Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Alexander Khalili

Edited by: Amina Inloes

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

This volume of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* comprises of the *tafsīr* of five complete mid size chapters, namely, Sūrah al-Shūrā (42), Sūrah al-Zukhruf (43), Sūrah al-Dukhān (44), Sūrah al-Jāthiya (45) and Sūrah al-Aḥqāf (46). All these sūrahs were revealed in Mecca and begin with the disconnected letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿah*), *Ḥā Mīm* and are commonly referred to as the Ḥā Mīm sūrahs. The central theme of most of these sūrahs is about revelation and warning the immoderate people with the threat of punishment.

Besides the subject of revelation being the main concern of Sūrah al-Shūrā, the sūrah also discusses the signs of Divine unity, *al-tawhīd* and not to mention, the repeated discussion of sustenance (*rizq*). This chapter also consists of *āyat al-mawaddah fī al-qurbā,* which is the verse enjoining affection for the Prophet's near relatives and everything associated with that:

> *That is of which God gives the good news to His servants, those who believe and do good deeds. Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives"; and whoever earns good, We give him more of good therein; surely God is Forgiving, Grateful.* (42:23)

Sūrah al-Zukhruf at the beginning mentions the sending of prophets in general and thereafter, discusses the immoderation of the faithless. The special concern of the sūrah is negation of the idea that God has any offspring. In addition, the sūrah discusses other interesting realities.

Surah al-Dukhān begins by mentioning the sending down of guidance through the clear book (*kitāb mubīn*) as a mercy from God to His servants on the Night of Ordainment (*laylat al-qadr*) and in which every definitive matter is confirmed. The sūrah then provides the faithless, who doubt the clear book, with a parallel of punishment in citing the story of Moses when he was sent to Pharaoh and his people to save the Israelites.

Sūrahs al-Jāthiya and al-Aḥqāf have the purpose of a general call in the form of a warning. Surah al-Jāthiyah begins by mentioning the signs of God's oneness and it emphasizes the importance of following the shariah (Divine codes) because ahead lies a day on which there will be compensation for righteous deeds—such as having faith and following

the Prophet's teachings—and punishment for anyone turning away from the religion. One of the most fascinating subjects discussed in this sūrah is how deeds are written down and recorded:

> *This is Our book, which speaks truly against you. Indeed We used to transcribe what you used to do.* (45:29)

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Surah al-Ahqāf commences by affirming the Resurrection in order to fulfill its aim which is to warn the idolaters who reject the prophetic call to believe in God and His Messenger about the Resurrection and the painful punishment that awaits therein for those who turn away and deny. This sūrah also contains arguments for God's oneness and prophethood, while referring to the destruction of the people of Hūd and of villages in the vicinity of Mecca and warning the idolaters of them.

We are grateful to all those who were involved in bringing this volume to fruition especially the translator, Alexander Khalili, and our chief editor, Dr. Amina Inloes. We attest that the translation rendered by Alexander from the Arabic text is meticulous and fluid as usual and we hope the readers will be inspired by yet another volume of this great exegesis.

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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers,

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1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative

study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 42

Sūrah al-Shūrā

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Verses 1-6

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah speaks about revelation (*waḥy*) as a kind of speech from God to His prophets and messengers. This is stated in the contents of its opening: *Thus does He reveal to you and to those who were before you, Allah, the All-mighty, the All-wise…* and its conclusion: *And it is not for any human that Allah should speak to him...* (42:51). Throughout the sūrah, the discourse returns to the theme of revelation time and again. At various points, God says:

And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Qur'an…. (42:7)

He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah…. (42:13)

Allah it is Who revealed the Book with the truth and the balance…. (42:17)

This is not to mention the sūrah's repeated discussion of sustenance (*rizq*), as we shall discuss.

So revelation is this sūrah's central concern. It also discusses the signs of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), the qualities of the faithful and the disbelievers, and what awaits each of them in their Resurrection and return to God. These are a second branch of discourse, but even these topics ultimately return to that of revelation in this sūrah.

The sūrah was revealed at Mecca, with the exception of *And those who respond to their Lord…* (42:38) until the third verse thereafter, and *…Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my near relatives…* (42:23) until the fourth verse thereafter. And these will be discussed below, God-willing.

حم ﴿١﴾ عسق ﴿٢﴾

(42:1–2) ***Ḥā Mīm. ʿAyn Sīn Qāf.***

These are some of the disconnected letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿah*) which occur at the beginning of several sūrahs of the Qur'an. This phenomenon is one of the unique features of the Qur'anic text which cannot be found in any other revealed scripture.

Early and later exegetes have offered different explanations of them, and Ṭabrisī records eleven different opinions about their meaning in his *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*:

First: They are part of the metaphorical verses (*mutashābihāt*) whose knowledge God has kept for himself and no one knows their interpretation (*taʾwīl*) except Him.1

Second: Each of them is a name for the sūrah at whose beginning they appear.

Third: They are names of the Qur'an as a whole.

Fourth: They signify God's names. The combination *alif lām mīm* stands for: "I am God, the all-knowing." The combination *alif lām mīm rā* stands for: "I am God, the all-knowing, the all-seeing." The combination *alif lām mīm ṣād* stands for: "I am God, the all-knowing, the distinguisher (*faṣl*)." The combination *kāf hā yāʿayn ṣād* can be broken down as follows: *Kāf* is from the All-Sufficing (*al-Kāfī*), *hāʾ* is from the Guide (*al-Hādī*), *yāʾ* is from the All-Wise (*al-Ḥakīm*), *ʿayn* is from the All-Knowing (*al-ʿAlīm*), and *ṣād* is from the All-Veracious (*al-Ṣādiq*). This opinion is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās. And the letters derived from the various names in this way differ according to whence they were taken from; there are those taken from the beginning of the name, such as *kāf* from *al-Kāfī*; there are others taken from the middle of the name, such as *yāʾ* from *al-Ḥakīm*, and then there are those taken from the end of the name, such as *mīm* from *al-ʿAlīm*.

Fifth: They are names of God which have been separated; were people able to recombine them properly, they would have known God's Greatest Name (*ism allāh al-aʿẓam*); for example, *alif lām rā, ḥā mīm,* and *nūn* together make *al-Raḥmān*, and so on. However, we are not able to combine them [properly]. This opinion is narrated from Saʿīd b. Jubayr.

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1 This alludes to the verse: *He it is Who has revealed the Book to you; some of its verses are decisive* (muḥkam). *They are the basis of the Book, and others are metaphorical* (mutashābih)*; then as for those in whose hearts there is perversity, they follow the part of it which is ambiguous, seeking to mislead and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation. but none knows its interpretation* (taʾwīl) *except God…* (3:7). [Trans.]

Sixth: They are oaths sworn by God. So it is as though He is swearing by these letters that the Qur'an is His own speech, and that these letters are ennobled by the fact that they comprise His revealed scriptures, His Beautiful Names, and His Divine Attributes, and provide the foundations for all the different languages of mankind.

Seventh: They are allusions to God's blessings, tribulations, and to the length that peoples shall reign—their durations and their appointed times.

Eighth: That they allude to the duration of this Nation (*ummah*) according to numerological calculations.

Ninth: They refer to all the letters of the alphabet, and mentioning only those which have been mentioned obviates the need to mention the remainder, just as one might use "ABC" to refer to the entire alphabet.

Tenth: They are there to silence the disbelievers. This is because the idolaters would advise one another not to listen to the Qur'an and hoot over it, as the Qur'an itself relates them saying: *Do not listen to this Qur'an and hoot it down…* (41:26). Perhaps they would whistle, or clap or heckle to distract the Prophet when He was reciting it aloud. So then God sent down these disconnected letters and when the faithless heard them they were intrigued by their strangeness and wondered what they could mean. In this way, they were distracted from their plan [to disrupt the recitation] and the Qur'an could reach their ears.

Eleventh: They serve to enumerate the letters of the alphabet. By this, God means to say: "This Qur'an which you are incapable of equalling is composed of the very letters which you speak with every day; if you cannot vie with it, you should know it is from God." These letters are only repeated in various places to demonstrate this fact. This opinion is narrated from Quṭrub, and is the preferred interpretation of Abū Muslim al-Isbahānī. A number of later commentators have also inclined towards it.

These are the eleven standard opinions. However, it is possible to construct yet another opinion from some of the material narrated in this regard. For example, it has been narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās about *alif lām mīm* that the *alif* stands for God, the *lām* for Gabriel, and the *mīm* for Muḥammad. Or, as has been narrated from others, that the disconnected letters that open the beginnings of these sūrahs allude to the goal made clear within them. For example, it is said that *nūn* refers to its sūrah containing tidings of victory promised to the Prophet. *Qāf* refers to the Qur'an or the divine might (*al-qahr al-ilāhī*) mentioned in the sūrah. Or, in yet another opinion, that these disconnected letters are to awaken people.

However, the truth is that there is something about these opinions that does not sit well in the heart.

As for the first opinion, we have already come across it in our discussion concerning the classification of verses into the categories of clear and ambiguous (*al-muḥkam wa al-mutashābih*) in the exegesis of 3:7, where it was one of the definitions offered for the "ambiguous verses."[1] We saw that clarity and ambiguity pertained to the semiotic understanding of the verse's import and that interpretation (*taʾwīl*) does not refer to a semiotic analysis of the verses but rather to the actual realities that emerge from the contents of the Qur'an's communications. This is something broader than being clear or ambiguous and, therefore, these disconnected letters cannot be the "ambiguous verses" (*mutashābihāt*) mentioned, nor are their meanings their "interpretations" (*taʾwīlāt*) of such verses.

As for the other ten opinions, these are theories that do not exceed the realm of mere possibility; there is no evidence to suggest that any one of them is accurate. However, there are some narrations attributed to the Prophet and the Imāms of the Prophet's Household (*ahl al-bayt*) which appear to support the fourth, seventh, eighth, and tenth opinions, and we shall discuss their import in our study of the narrations below, God-willing.

It must not be forgotten that these disconnected letters are repeated in various sūrahs, numbering twenty nine in total, some of which begin with one letter (*ṣād, qāf or nūn*); others begin with two (*ṭā hā, ṭā sīn, yā sīn, ḥā mīm*); others still begin with three (two with *alif lām mīm*, one with *alif lām rā*, and one with *ṭā sīn mīm*); some begin with four (*alif lām mīm ṣād, alif lām mīm rā*); and some begin with five (as in the two sūrahs beginning *kāf hā yā ʿayn ṣād* and *ḥā mīm ʿayn sīn qāf*).

These disconnected letters also differ insofar as some only appear in one location (such as *nūn*), while others appear at the opening of several *sūrah*s (such as *alif lām mīm, alif lām rā, ṭā sīn* and *ḥā mīm*).

Now, when we look at the *sūrah*s that have these letters at their beginnings, we notice that when two *sūrah*s share the same letters, they also share a certain similarity in contents that is not found between them and other *sūrah*s. This is corroborated by the similar phrases found at the beginning of the *sūrah*s; for example, all the *sūrah*s beginning with *hā mīm*

1 *Muḥkam* was translated as "decisive" rather than "clear" in the English version of the exegesis of 3:7. Both renderings of *muḥkam* are acceptable. [Trans.]

open with the statement *The sending down of the Book is from God* (40:2) or words to the same effect. Meanwhile, the *sūrah*s beginning with *alif lām rā* open with *These are the signs of the Book* (15:1) or a similar phrase. We see something like this happening at the beginnings of those *sūrah*s that open with *ṭā sīn* and again with those disconnected letters containing a *mīm*, which are usually followed by a statement denying that there is in doubt in the Book.[1]

With this in mind, we can surmise that there is a special connection between the letters at the beginning of these *sūrah*s and the topics that they contain. This seems to be confirmed by Sūrat al-Aʿrāf, which begins with the letters *alif lām mīm ṣād* and whose contents combine the themes of those *sūrah*s beginning with *mīm* and Sūrat Ṣād. This also applies to Sūrat al-Raʿd, which opens with *alif lām mīm rā* and whose contents combine the themes of *sūrah*s beginning with *alif lām mīm* and those which open with *alif lām rā*.

The above suggests that these disconnected letters are a secret code between God and His Messenger, whose full meaning is hidden from us and which cannot be understood through mundane means beyond the extent that we sense there is a special connection between them and the contents of the *sūrah*s which they open.

Perhaps someone who reflects on the letters shared between various *sūrah*s and compares the meanings of the different *sūrah*s in which they appear can arrive at a more precise understanding of this phenomenon.

This could be the meaning of a tradition the Ahl al-Sunnah narrate from ʿAlī—reported in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*—that every book has a quintessence (*ṣafwah*) and the quintessence of the Qur'an is the letters of the alphabet.

كَذَٰلِكَ يُوحِي إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣﴾ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٤﴾

(42:3–4) ***Thusly does He reveal to you and to those who were before you, God, the All-mighty, the All-wise. His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, and He is the High, the Great.***

1 See, for example, *This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the Godwary* (2:2). [Trans.]

As we said, the aim of this *sūrah* is to expound the nature of revelation by defining its essential reality and highlighting its goals and effects. So when God says *Thusly…* (*kadhālika*), he is referring to the phenomenon of revelation embodied in sending this *sūrah* to the Prophet. At the same time, He provides a general definition for revelation by comparing it to this particular instance, to which he refers directly and to which the Prophet himself is a witness. It is as if we wanted to explain the concept of a human being to someone by saying, "The human being is like Zayd."

When God says *to you and to those before you* he means "to all of you." But he uses this choice of words to show that revelation is a Divine Custom (*sunnah ilāhiyyah*) which has taken place throughout human history and is not a novel occurrence. In other words, he means to say, "O Prophets! The revelation which We send down to you, one prophet after another as a continuous custom of Ours, is just like the revelation which you clearly see in the sending down of this sūrah."

Some commentators have read God's saying *thusly* as referring not to revelation itself, but rather to its contents. This would mean God is actually referring to the teachings contained within the sūrah. On this basis, the commentators argue that the contents of this sūrah were part of the teachings that God revealed to all His Prophets, and this is where the commonality of revelation stems from. However, you will have noticed that this understanding does not accord with the general purpose of the sūrah or fit in with the tone of its verses.

…the All-mighty, the All-wise… His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, and He is the High, the Great: These are five of God's Beautiful Names (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*); when he says *His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth*, this conveys the meaning of his Name, the Sovereign (*al-mālik*). This combination alludes to the fundamental reason for revelation and its being a continuous Divine Custom. Revelation conveys the Divine Religion which contains the guidance necessary for mankind to attain felicity in their lives in this world and Hereafter; no one can prevent God from sending revelation because He is Mighty (*ʿazīz*), meaning that nothing can forestall His will; He cannot ignore His servants' need for guidance because He is Wise (*ḥakīm*), meaning perfect in action, and an action is only perfect if it brings about its desired outcome; God is entitled to administer his servants and their affairs however He wishes because He is their sovereign (*mālik*); He is entitled to demand their obedience to His commands and prohibitions because He is High (*ʿalī*) and

Great (ʿaẓīm). As you can see, each of these five Names play a role in the existence of revelation and, taken together, they show that God is mankind's guardian from every aspect. They have no guardian except him.

تَكَادُ السَّمَاوَاتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِنْ فَوْقِهِنَّ ۚ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ
رَبِّهِمْ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ ۝

(42:5) ***The heavens may almost rend asunder from above them, and the angels sing the praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth; now surely God is the Forgiving, the Merciful.***

"To rend asunder" (*yatafaṭṭur*) means to split apart. It is derived from the root *f-ṭ-r*, meaning "to split".

Recall that these verses are set forth to expound the nature, purpose, and phenomenon of revelation. With this in mind, their context and tone suggest that the reason *the heavens may almost rend asunder from above them* is the revelation descending through them from God, the High and Great, on its way to the earth. God is the origin of this revelation, the heavens are the paths it takes, and the earth is its destination. As God has said elsewhere: *And certainly We made above you seven paths* (ṭarāʾiq)*; and never are We heedless of creation* (23:17).

The reason God says that the heavens "rend asunder *from above them*"[1] is clear; revelation descends upon the heavens from above, from the presence of He who possesses absolute Highness and absolute Greatness. So if the heavens were to rupture, it would naturally be from above.

This exalts and magnifies the status of revelation, for it is the speech of the Highest and Greatest One. It is because this speech is imbued with such magnificence that the heavens themselves are about to split open as it passes through them. And because this speech is descending from the Most High, if they were to split open, it could only be from above.

So this verse magnifies the status of the Divine Speech with regards to its descent and passage through the heavens. And we find similar language and imagery throughout the Qur'an. For example:

…until when fear shall be removed from their hearts, They shall say: What is it that your Lord said? They shall say: The truth. And He is the

1 Note that "them" here is the feminine plural pronoun *hunna*, which refers to the heavens themselves. [Trans.]

Most High, the Great (34:23). This verse magnifies the Divine Speech with regards to the angels of the heavens receiving it.

Had We sent down this Qur'an on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down, splitting asunder because of the fear of God (59:21). This verse magnifies the Revelation by supposing it had been sent down upon the mountains.

And *Surely We will make to light upon you a weighty Word* (71:5). This verse magnifies it by describing the burden and difficulty of carrying it.

Some commentators have suggested one of two other meanings to this verse:

First: That it means they almost rend asunder because of God's greatness and magnificence, as might be suggested by the verse immediately beforehand describing God as *the High* and *the Great.*

Second: That it means the heavens almost rend asunder because of the polytheism (*shirk*) of the idolaters upon the earth and their claim *The All-Merciful has taken a son* (19:88), about which God says: *The heavens may almost be rent thereat* (20:3).

However, under both of these interpretations it becomes difficult to explain why the heavens should be rent asunder *from above,* especially with regards to the second of the two. It is also difficult to explain how this relates to what comes next in the verse: *…the angels sing the praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth; now surely God is the Forgiving, the Merciful.* And this is obvious to anyone who refers to the books of those who offer these alternate meanings.

…and the angels sing the praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth: In other words, they declare him to be transcendent (*tanzīh*) above anything that does not befit the Divine Presence (*al-ḥaḍrah al-ilāhiyyah*) and extol the beauty of His actions. Something that does not befit the Divine Presence is that God should neglect the affairs of His servants, or leave them without the guidance of a religion promulgated by Him through revelation, which is one of His beautiful acts. The angels ask Him to forgive the inhabitants of the earth, but forgiveness can only be attained through attaining its means (*sabab*). And the means of attaining forgiveness is none other than walking upon the path of divine servanthood (*ʿubūdiyyah*) by following God's guidance. So when the angels entreat Him to forgive mankind, His response to their supplications is to promulgate a religion to forgive whoever follows it. In other words, the angels ask God to reveal a religion to the inhabitants of the earth which

they can follow in order to attain His forgiveness.

This reading finds support in the fact that this sentence occurs in the context of expounding the nature of Divine Revelation. It is also supported by the fact that the angels are asking forgiveness for the inhabitants of the earth. After all, it makes no sense for the angels to plead forgiveness indiscriminately for everyone upon the earth, even for those who say, *God has taken a son*, especially when God says of them: *…and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful* (23:7). On this basis, we can see their pleading for forgiveness to mean that they are asking God to promulgate a religion for all the inhabitants of the earth, in order that those who follow it might be forgiven.

…now surely God is the Forgiving, the Merciful: God is endowed with the attributes of forgiveness and mercy, and He is given the names "the Forgiving" (*al-ghafūr*) and "the Merciful" (*al-raḥīm*). Therefore, it befits God to treat the inhabitants of the earth in such a way that they will obtain mercy and forgiveness from Him. And this means it befits Him to promulgate a religion through Divine Speech and revelation to guide them to felicity (*saʿādah*).

The words, *now surely God…* imply that He accepted the angels' entreaties and that He will actually grant more than what they asked for in response.

وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهُ حَفِيظٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿٦﴾

(42:6) ***And those who take guardians besides Him, God watches over them, and you have no charge over them.***

In the previous verse, we saw that God is the guardian of His servants and they have no guardian except Him. He looks after the affairs of whoever of them dwells upon the earth by providing them with a religion with which He is pleased by sending revelation to His prophets. This is due to His nature as expressed in His Beautiful Names and Divine Attributes. The logical corollary of this is that His servants should not take any guardians beside him. The present verse discusses the state of those who do just this by assigning partners to Him, whether in lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) or divinity (*ulūhiyyah*). It says He is neither heedless of what they do, nor are their deeds forgotten; they will be held to account for them. But the Prophet's

only duty is to convey his message; he is not their keeper and will not be questioned about their actions.

So when God says *God watches over them*, this means He keeps record of their idolatry (*shirk*) and the evil deeds that stem from it.

And when He says *and you have no charge over them*, He means you have not been made responsible for putting right their deeds or guiding them to the truth. This statement is meant to console and reassure the Prophet.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related:[1]

Abū Yāsir b. Akhṭab and a group of Jewish men passed by God's Messenger while he was reciting the beginning of Sūrat al-Baqarah: *Alif, lām, mīm. That is the Book…* whereat his brother, Ḥuyayy b. Akhṭab, came to him in this group and said to them: "Do you know? By God, I have heard Muḥammad recite some of his revelation that says: *Alif, lām, mīm. That is the book….*"

They said: "You have heard it?"

He said: "Yes."

So this group went walking to God's Messenger and said to him: "O Muḥammad! Do you not mention that in your revelation you recite: *Alif, lām, mīm. That is the book…*?"

He replied: "I do."

They said: "Gabriel brought you this from God?"

He said: "Yes."

They said: "God has sent prophets before you, but we know of none to whom God made clear the duration of his reign nor the appointed time of his nation except you."

Ḥuyayy b. Akhṭab said, stepping in front of those who he was with: "*Alif* is one, *lām* is thirty and *mīm* is forty. So this makes seventy-one years. Will you enter the religion of a prophet whose reign and his nation shall last no more than seventy-one years?!"

aThen he turned to God's Messenger and asked: "O Muḥammad, is there anything else with this?"

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1 It is related by Ibn Isḥāq, as well as Bukhārī in his *Tārīkh* and Ibn Jarīr, a narration with a weak chain (*sanad ḍaʿīf*) from Ibn ʿAbbās, from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Rubāb.

"Yes."
"What?"
"*Alif, lām, mīm, ṣād*."
"This is longer and more momentous! *Alif* is one, *lām* is thirty, *mīm* is forty, and *ṣād* is ninety. That is one hundred and sixty years. Is there more?"
"Yes."
"What?"
"*Alif, lām, rā*."
"This is longer and more momentous still! *Alif* is one, *lām* is thirty, and *rā* is two hundred. So this is two hundred and thirty one years. Is there more?"
"Yes."
"What?"
"*Alif lām mīm rā*."
"This is even longer and more momentous! *Alif* is one, *lām* is thirty, *mīm* is forty and *rā* is two hundred. That makes two hundred and seventy-one!"
Then he said: "Your affair is confusing for us, Muḥammad; we do not know whether you have been given a little or a lot."
Then they got up and Abū Yāsir said to his brother Ḥuyayy and the rabbis who were with him: "What do you know? Perhaps all of this has been given to Muḥammad: seventy-one, one hundred and sixty-one, two hundred and thirty-one… that makes seven hundred and thirty-four!"
They said: "His affair is unclear to us."
On the basis of this tradition, they claim that the verse descended: *He it is Who has revealed the Book to you; some of its verses are decisive. They are the basis of the Book, and others are ambiguous…* (3:7).

Author's comments: A similar tradition is narrated by Ibn Mundhir from Ibn Jarīḥ, and one like it is related by Qummī in his *Tafsīr* from his father, from Ibn Riʾāb, from Muḥammad b. Qays, from Abū Jaʿfar. None of these traditions indicate that the Prophet approved of their claims, nor that they had a basis for them. And we have already seen that the ambiguous verses are not the disconnected letters at the beginning of various sūrahs.

(2) In *Maʿānī*, it is related via a chain from Juwayrī from Sufiyān al-Thawrī, who says:

I said to Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: "O Son of God's Messenger! What does it mean when God says: '*alif, lām, mīm*', '*alif, lām, mīm, ṣād*', '*alif, lām, rā*', '*alif, lām, mīm, rā*', '*kaf, hā, yā, ʿayn, ṣād*', '*ṭā, hā*', '*ṭā, sīn*', '*tā, sīn, mīm*', '*yā, sīn*', '*ṣād*', '*ḥā, mīm*', '*hā, mīm, ʿayn, sīn*', '*qāf*' and '*nūn*'?"

He replied: "As for *alif lām mīm* at the opening of al-Baqarah, it means 'I am God, the Sovereign (*al-malik*).' As for *alif lām mīm* at the beginning of Āl-i ʿImrān, it means 'I am God, the Glorious (*al-majīd*).' *Alif lām mīm ṣād* means 'I am God, the Almighty (*al-muqtadir*) and Veracious (*al-ṣādiq*).' *Alif lām rā* means 'I am God, the Kindest (*al-raʾūf*).' *Alif lām mīm rā* means 'I am God, the Giver of Life (*al-muḥyi*), the Causer of Death (*al-mumīt*), and the Sustainer (*al-rāziq*).' *Kāf hā yā ʿayn ṣād* means 'I am the All-Sufficient (*al-kāfī*), the Guide (*al-hādī*), the Guardian (*al-walī*), the Knowing (*al-ʿālim*), the Truthful in His promise (*al-sādiq al-waʿd*).' As for *ṭā hā*, it is one of the Prophet's names, and it means 'O you who seek the truth and guide others towards it! The Qur'an was not sent down to you to grieve you but rather for you to attain felicity thereby!'

"As for *ṭa sīn*, this means 'I am the Seeker (*al-ṭālib*) and the All-Hearing (*al-samīʿ*). *Tā sīn mīm* means 'I am the Seeker, the All-Hearing, the Originator (*al-mubdī*) and the Returner (*al-muʿīd*).' As for *yā sīn*, it is another one of the Prophet's names and it means 'O you who hears the revelation and the wise Qur'an, you are indeed one of the messengers upon the straight path!'

"*Ṣād* is a spring that bubbles up from beneath the Throne and it is in this spring that the Prophet performed his ablutions when he ascended on the *Miʿrāj*, and Gabriel enters it once every day, immersing himself in it before emerging and flapping his wings; there is not a drop that falls from his wings save that God creates an angel from it that glorifies God, sanctifies Him, magnifies Him, and praises Him until the Day of Resurrection.

"*Ḥā mīm* means the Praiseworthy and Glorious (*al-ḥamīd al-majīd*). *Ḥā mīm ʿayn sīn qāf* means the All-Clement (*al-ḥalīm*), the Rewarder (*al-muthīb*), the Knower (*al-ʿālim*), the All-Hearing (*al-ṣamīʿ*), the Mighty (*al-qādir*), and the Powerful (*al-qawwī*).

"*Qāf* is a mountain that surrounds the earth and gives the heavens

their green hue. It is with this mountain that God prevents the earth from shaking with its inhabitants.

"*Nūn* is a river in Paradise to which God says: 'Be solid!' And it solidifies into ink, then God tells the Pen (*al-qalam*): 'Write!' So the Pen writes whatever was, is, and will be until the Day of Resurrection upon the Guarded Tablet. The Ink is an ink of light, the Pen is a pen of light, and the Tablet is a tablet of light."

I said: "O Son of God's Messenger! Explain to me fully the nature of the Tablet, the Pen and the Ink, and teach me that which God has taught you!"

He replied: "O Son of Saʿīd, were you not worthy of an answer, I would not have given one to you. *Nūn* is an angel that conveys to the Pen, which is an angel. The Pen conveys to the Tablet, which is an angel, and the Tablet to Raphael, Raphael to Michael, and Michael to Gabriel. Then Gabriel conveys it to the Prophets and Messengers—may God's blessings be upon them all." Then he said to me: "Now be gone, O Sufiyān, for I worry about you!"

Author's comments: The apparent meaning of this narration suggests the common interpretation that the disconnected letters refer to the Divine Names and are actually letters taken from those names, whether from their beginning, like the *mīm* of *al-Malik*, *al-Majīd*, or *al-Muqtadir*, or from their middle, like the *lām* of *Allāh*, or from their end, like the *yāʾ* of *walī*. In this case, the disconnected letters are coded references to God's Names. The same meaning has also been transmitted through Sunni chains of narration from Ibn ʿAbbās, Rabīʿ b. Anas and others. However, it should be obvious to the reader that coded communications are only used to convey something that the speaker only wants his intended recipient to understand, so he uses a code known only to them that no one else can decipher. But these Divine Names have been explicitly mentioned and explained, both in general and in detail, in many places throughout His speech. This means there is no point in referring to each of them in a code derived from their letters.

Therefore, the proper understanding of this narration—assuming that it is authentic—is that these letters signify these meanings [of the Divine Names] in an unconventional sense (*dalālah ghayr waḍʿiyyah*). In other words, they are symbols whose true meaning is unknown to us and hidden from us; they signify levels of meaning that are too exalted and sublime for us to comprehend. This is supported somewhat by the fact that the

tradition offers several different meanings for the letter *mīm* in different situations. And the same is true concerning that which has been narrated about God's Greatest Name (*ism allāh al-aʿẓam*).

As for his saying, "*Qāf* is a mountain that surrounds the earth and gives the heavens their green hue…", we find a similar narration in Qummī's *Tafsīr*. It is also found in Sunni narrations transmitted from Ibn ʿAbbās and others. Some of these describe it as an emerald mountain that surrounds the world at the edge of the heavens, while others say that it is a mountain that surrounds the Ocean that surrounds the world, and the heavens hover upon it, and that there are seven earths, seven oceans, and seven heavens.

In one of the narrations from Ibn ʿAbbās, we read: "God created a mountain called *Qāf* which encompasses the world; its roots extend deep into the rock upon which the earth rests. When God desires to cause an earthquake in a village, he commands the mountain to move the root beneath that village, causing it to shake and tremble. This is how He quakes one village but not another."

The tenor of these traditions resembles that of *Isrāʾīliyyāt*.[1] And were it not for the phrase: "…It is with this mountain that God prevents the earth from shaking with its inhabitants", it would have been possible to interpret the statement, "*Qāf* is a mountain that surrounds the earth and gives the heavens their green hue", to mean the atmosphere that surrounds the earth with a little effort.

As for his saying that *Ṭā Hā* and *Yā Sīn* are names of the Prophet with the meanings given above, we should understand it on the basis of what we have said above, and interpret the many narrations from Sunni and Shiʿa sources saying that these are names of the Prophet in the same way.

Then he says that *Nūn* is a river God transformed into ink, and the Pen wrote everything that had happened and would happen until the Day of Resurrection upon the Tablet in this ink; and that the Ink, the Pen, and the Tablet are made of light, and that they are all angels. This statement confirms that whatever God has said about the Throne, the Seat, the Tablet, the Pen, and other such entities, and however these entities have been explained in the sayings of the Prophet and the Imāms, are all similitudes (*tamthīl*) which are used to approximate metaphysical realities—realities too sublime and exalted for most people to understand—in accessible

1 Teachings and sayings derived from Jewish and Christian sources [Trans.].

sensible terms (*maḥsūs*).

(3) In *Maʿānī* also, Ṣadūq narrates a tradition with a chain going back to Abū Baṣīr, who relates that Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said:

Alif lām mīm is one letter (*ḥarf*) of the letters of God's Greatest Name which are scattered throughout the Qur'an, which are combined [properly] by the Prophet and Imām, so that when they supplicate with them their supplication is answered….

Author's comments: The idea that these disconnected letters are letters from God's Greatest Name that have been scattered throughout the Qur'an is narrated through a number of Sunni chains of transmission, going back to Ibn ʿAbbās and others. However, it became clear in our discussion of God's Beautiful Names (*asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā*) in Sūrat al-Aʿrāf that God's Greatest Name which has its own special effectiveness is not something which you utter. So any tradition narrated to the effect that this Name is a word made up of uttered letters must be turned aside from its apparent meaning as best possible.

(4) Also in *Maʿānī* is a tradition from Muḥammad b. Ziyād and Muḥammad b. Sayyār from Imām al-ʿAskarī, in which he says:

The Jews and Quraysh have lied about the Qur'an when they say: "A clear case of sorcery (*siḥr mubīn*)!" God says: *Alif lām mīm, that is the Book…*; in other words: "O Muḥammad! This Book which We have sent down to you is made up of scattered letters, including *alif*, *lām* and *mīm*. [O people!][1] It is in your own language, made up of letters from your own alphabet, so bring the like thereof if you are truthful [in your claim that it is sorcery], and seek the help of all your witnesses to do that…."

Author's comments: The tradition is from *Tafsīr al-ʿAskarī*, and it is weak (*ḍaʿīf*).

(5) And in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and the narration of Abū al-Jārūd from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] concerning God's words, *the heavens may almost rend asunder from above them* (42:5), he says:

Meaning, they may almost crack (*yataṣaddiʿna*).

1 This shift in address is signified in the Arabic by a transition (*iltifāt*) from the second-person singular pronoun (*ka*) in "We have sent down to you" (*anzalnā ʿalayk*) to the second-person plural pronoun (*kum*) in "in your own language" (*fī lughatikum*), which indicates the speaker is no longer addressing the Prophet (an individual) but rather a group of people (a plurality). [Trans.]

(6) And it is narrated in *Jawāmiᶜ al-Jāmīᶜ* about the verse *and ask forgiveness for those on earth*… that Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Those on earth who are faithful (*muʾminīn*).

Author's comments: A tradition to the same effect is narrated in *Majmaᶜ* from him, and Qummī narrates it implicitly.

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Verses 7-12

This is a second group of verses, in which revelation is defined according to its end result, just as in the first group it was defined through reference to itself.

These verses make clear that the goal of revelation is to warn mankind, especially with regards to the Day of Gathering when people will be separated into two groups; one of which will go to Paradise and the other will be in Hellfire. Moreover, were it not for this warning about the Day of Gathering—a day on which people will be held to account and recompense for their deeds—then the prophetic mission would not have any effect.

They also state that it is God's will to divide mankind into these two groups. This is why He sends down religion to mankind and warns about the Day of Gathering through His revelation; because He is their guardian (*walī*) who revives them after their death, and who will judge between them concerning that about which they differ.

Then the discourse shifts to discuss Divine Unity in Lordship (*tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah*), meaning that God is the Lord and there is no lord besides Him. This is because only He possesses the attributes of lordship; there is no one who shares any part of it with him.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّتُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا وَتُنذِرَ
يَوْمَ الْجَمْعِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ ۚ فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ ﴿٧﴾

(42:7) ***And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Qur'an, that you may warn the Mother of the Cities (*Umm al-Qurā*) and those around it, and that you may give warning of the day of gathering together wherein is no doubt; a party shall be in the Garden and [another] party in the burning fire.***

And thus… refers to the revelation mentioned above; *…the mother city…* is Mecca, and to *…warn the mother city…* means to warn its people; *…those around it…* refers to all the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula beyond the city of Mecca, as supported by the description of the Qur'an as *…an Arabic Qur'an*.

The reason why God singles out the Arabian Peninsula here is that the Prophet's mission had several stages in its scope. The Prophet's public mission began when he called his closest kinfolk to believe, as God says *And warn your nearest relations* (26:214); then his mission broadened to encompass all the Arabs, as He says: *an Arabic Qur'an for a people who know* (32:3); and finally it expanded to include to all mankind, as He says: *and this Qur'an has been revealed to me that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches* (6:19).

This idea that the Prophet's mission gradually expanded in scope is supported in part by God's saying *Say: I do not ask you for any reward for it; nor am I of those who affect. It is nothing but a reminder to the worlds* (36:86–87). The tone of this verse we have just quoted suggests that it is directed to the disbelievers amongst the Quraysh. God says it is a reminder to the worlds, meaning it is not only for some people to the exclusion of others, because if it is for everyone, then it is senseless for some people—like the Prophet—to ask others for some sort of compensation.

And just as the calling of the People of the Book, especially the Jews and the Christians, to Islam is one of the facts of the Qur'an, so too is the conversion to Islam of non-Arabs such as Salmān al-Fārisī, Bilāl al-Ḥabashī and Ṣuhayb al-Rūmī one of the facts of early Islamic history.

It is said: *...those around it…* means the rest of humanity; the inhabitants of all the towns of the earth, and this is supported by its reference to Mecca as *…the mother of towns….*

In any case, this verse defines revelation according to its goal. And the goal is to warn people through divine communication in the form of prophethood (*nubuwwah*), so revelation is divine communication for the purposes of prophethood and warning mankind (*indhār*).

…and that you may give warning of the day of gathering together wherein is no doubt; a party shall be in the garden and [another] party in the burning fire: This sentence is in conjunction (*ʿaṭf*) with the previous sentence *...that you may warn*. This is an instance of a particular clause (*khāṣṣ*) being conjoined to a general one (*ʿāmm*) because of its importance, as if to say: "So that you may warn people and make them fear God, especially of His anger on the Day of Gathering!"

When He says *the day of gathering*, this is the second object (*mafʿūl*) of the verb *warn* and not an adverb (*ẓarf*) for it, as should be clear.[1] And

1 If it was an adverb for warn, the sentence would mean: "And warn them on

the Day of Gathering refers to the Day of Resurrection, as God says: *this is a day on which the people shall be gathered together… then [some] of them shall be wretched and [others] felicitous* (11:105).

When God says, *a party shall be in the garden and [another] party in the burning fire*, He wants to explain the reason for what He has just said and prevent any confusion arising therefrom. It is as if someone asked: "Why should he warn them of the Day of Gathering?" So the answer was given: *a party shall be in the garden and [another] party in the burning fire.* In other words, they shall be divided into two groups; one shall be felicitous and rewarded, another shall be wretched and punished, so let them be warned that they might beware the path of wretchedness and avoid falling into destruction!

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَهُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَٰكِنْ يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ ۚ
وَالظَّالِمُونَ مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿٨﴾

(42:8) ***And if God had pleased, He would surely have made them a single community, but He makes whom He pleases enter into His mercy, and the unjust it is that shall have no guardian or helper.***

This verse explains why it is necessity to warn mankind by sending prophets on the basis that they will be divided into two groups on the Day of Judgement. It might come to someone's mind that if God had made mankind a single community altogether, then there would have been no division or distinction between them; everyone would have been the same—whether felicitous or wretched—without any difference and there would have been no need for prophets to warn humanity.

However, God says, …*but He makes whom He pleases enter into His mercy, and the unjust it is that shall have no guardian or helper.* This is a coda showing that it is God's habit (*sunnah*) to sort people into groups. He did not desire to make them a single community, as demonstrated by the phrase *He makes whom He pleases enter into His mercy.* The verse uses the imperfect tense to show that this sorting is a continuous process. After all, God did not say—for example—"But He entered (perfect/past tense) into His mercy whomever He pleased."

In this verse, the words …*whom He pleases*… are juxtaposed with the

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the Day of Gathering…." [Trans.]

words *…and the unjust it is…* which reveal to us the meaning: "whomever He pleases besides the unjust." God explains who "the unjust" (*ẓālimīn*) are on the Day of Resurrection by saying: *Then a crier will cry out among them that the curse of God is on the unjust. Who hinder [people] from God's way and seek to make it crooked, and they are disbelievers in the hereafter* (7:44–5). So "the unjust" are those who stubbornly deny the Resurrection.

The phrase *He makes… enter into His mercy…* is also juxtaposed with *…shall have no guardian or helper*. This implies that the people who enter into His mercy are those whose guardian is God, and the people who *have no guardian or helper* are those whom God shall not admit into His mercy. Moreover, this also shows that mercy (*raḥmah*) is heaven, while the lack of a guardian or helper corresponds to hell.

So this verse means that God only appointed prophets to warn mankind on the basis of revelation because of the fact that mankind faces being divided into two groups on the Day of Resurrection, so that they can avoid being part of the group that goes to Hell.

And had God wished, He would have made them a single community; their condition would be the same and they would not be divided into two groups on the Day of Resurrection, in which case there would be no need for prophets to warn mankind and there would be no revelation. But He did not desire that. Instead, His habit was to look after a group of them who were not unjust, admit them into His mercy, and enter them into Paradise. He would not look after those who were unjust, leaving them with neither a guardian nor a helper, and they would enter the Fire from which they had no opportunity for salvation.

In light of the above, we can see that making them a single community (*ummah wāḥidah*) means making them equal by making all of them enter Paradise or making all of them enter Hellfire. In other words, nothing compels God to admit the felicitous to Paradise or the wretched to Hellfire had He not wished it so. But He wanted to separate the two groups, so this became His habit and His promise, and God does not break His promises. And yet, in spite of this, His power remains absolute: it is neither removed nor altered. So when He says, *and that you may give warning of the day of gathering together wherein is no doubt… and the unjust it is that shall have no guardian or helper*, this is in the sense of the verse in Sūrah Hūd: *this is a day on which the people shall be gathered together… We will pay them back in full their portion undiminished* (11:103–109). So ponder on this.

It is said: Making them a single community means making them all

faithful (*muʾminīn*) who will enter Paradise. In *Kashshāf*, Zamakhsharī says:

> This means, had your Lord willed, He could have used His power to compel them all to believe. However, in His wisdom He willed to make them responsible for their own deeds and base their ultimate fates on what they chose for themselves, that the faithful might enter His mercy. It is they who are meant by whom He pleases (*man yashāʾ*). Do you not see their situation is contrasted with that of the unjust, and that God leaves the unjust without any guardian or helper against His punishment?

For his view, Zamakhsharī adduces as evidence the meaning of this verse:

> *And if We had pleased, We would certainly have given to every soul its guidance*…. (32:13)
> *…and if your Lord had pleased, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them*…. (10:99)

And the evidence that the meaning of this verse is to force them to believe is the coda: *…will you then force men till they become believers?*

However, as you know, the verses under discussion must be read in the context of defining revelation according to its goals. It is the division of people into two groups on the Day of Gathering that is the very raison d'être for sending prophets to warn people by way of revelation. With this in mind, the verse *And if God had pleased, He would surely have made them a single community…* serves to clarify that He is neither compelled nor obligated to do this; if He so wills He can choose not to do it. This only makes sense if the verse means making them a single community—however they are—instead of divided into two groups. There is nothing in the verse to imply that He means to make them a single group of believers in particular.

As for the two verses, Zamakhsharī adduces to support his interpretation, their context differs from the verse under discussion. As he says, they do refer to compelling people to believe, and we have already discussed them elsewhere in this work.

It is said: The most appropriate reading for this context is uniting them in faithlessness by making them a single disbelieving community, as God says in the verse: *People were a single nation; so God raised prophets* (2:213). This means that had God wished, He would have left them as a single community united by their disbelief by not sending any messenger to warn

them. In which case, they would have surely remained in their original state of faithlessness. However, God admits into His mercy whomsoever He pleases; it is His habit to send everyone a warner so that anyone who would be receptive can be given the blessing of belief in and obedience to Him in this world, and then be admitted into His mercy in the Hereafter. Those who are not receptive are the wrongdoers; they will live faithlessly in this world and then enter hell in the Hereafter, not having any guardian or helper.

However, there are a few points we must consider here. First, when the verse to which this comparison is being drawn says "a single nation", this does not mean they were united upon faithlessness. Rather, it means that there were no differences amongst them in matters relating to their way of living, as we have already mentioned in our discussion of that verse. Moreover, if we accept this interpretation, this leads to a contradiction between the verse under discussion and the verse to which it is being compared; the former says that people are be divided into groups anyway, while the verse to which it is being compared (according to the quoted interpretation) says that they are unified and not divided into groups at all.

Now, one could respond that the verse adduced from Sūrat al-Baqarah[1] indicates that people were a single nation according to their natural disposition (*ṭabᶜ*) rather than in actuality (*fiᶜliyyah*), so there is actually no contradiction between the two verses. However, we must reject this reading because it contradicts the meaning of those verses which indicate that the human being is a believer according to his innate human nature (*fiṭrah aṣliyyah*), as in the verse: *And the soul and Him Who fashioned it, Then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it* (91:7–8).

The second point we must consider is that this reading removes the juxtaposition between the statements …*but He makes whom He pleases enter into His mercy*… and …*the unjust*… without reason, requiring a torturous interpretation to arrive at the same meaning and preserve this verse's central conceit.

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ ۖ فَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْوَلِيُّ وَهُوَ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٩﴾

(42:9) ***Or have they taken guardians besides Him? But God is the***

1 See verse 2:213. (Pub.)

Guardian, and He gives life to the dead, and He has power over all things.

The use of Or…? (*am*) here implies a repudiation (*inkār*), as Zamakhsharī has stated. The previous verse told us that God looks after the affairs of the faithful alone and enters them into His mercy, while the unjust—meaning those who obstinately disbelieve—have no guardian to protect them. In this verse we see that this is because they have taken guardians whom they follow and worship besides God, while they should have followed and worshipped Him instead. They are rebuked for this and criticized for failing to take God as a guardian with one argument after another. This is represented by God's saying: *But God is the Guardian, and He gives life to the dead, and He has power over all things…*

When God says, *But God is the Guardian…*, this explains why He repudiates them above for taking guardians besides Him, and provides the conclusive argument (*ḥujjah*) for why they should have taken Him as their guardian in the first place. The sentence, *But God is the Guardian…* indicates that guardianship (*wilāyah*) belongs only to God. And the proof for the fact that guardianship rests only with Him can be found in the aforementioned verse: *Thus does God, the Mighty, the Wise, reveal to you, and [thus He revealed] to those before you. His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, and He is the High, the Great* (42:3–4), as we have discussed in our commentary on it.

So this means that God is the only true guardian in existence. Therefore, anyone who wishes to take a guardian should take Him as one and not seek recourse to others, for there is none who can be their guardian besides Him.

When God says *…and He gives life to the dead…*, this is the second argument for taking Him alone as a guardian. Its upshot is that the ultimate goal of taking a guardian, following him, and serving him is to be spared punishment in hell and win entry to heaven on the Day of Resurrection. The one who punishes and rewards on the Day of Resurrection is none other than God, who gives life to the dead, gathers them, and then requites them for their deeds. Therefore, it is God who should be taken as a guardian rather than the guardians they have taken; their guardians are lifeless and dead, and they shall be just as senseless when they are resurrected.

God's saying *…and He has power over all things* represents the third argument for why they should take God alone as their guardian. It is to the

effect that in order to have guardianship, the guardian must have power over the affairs and conditions of those for whom he acts as a guardian. God has power over all things, and no one has any power besides Him save that which He has bestowed upon them. Whatever a person may possess, God is its true master, and whatever power they may have, it is in truth His power. So He is the true guardian; there is no guardian except him.

وَمَا اخْتَلَفْتُمْ فِيهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَحُكْمُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبِّي عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ ﴿١٠﴾

(42:10) *And in whatever thing you disagree, the ruling thereof is to God; that is God, my Lord, on Him do I rely and to Him do I turn time after time.*

This is the fourth argument for God being the sole guardian in existence. The ruling of an arbitrator between disputants is his verdicts (*aḥkām*) and settling the case being contested by them. They might dispute in a matter of belief, such as whether God is one or many, or perhaps in a matter of action (or something which devolves to an action), such as a disagreement in matters of daily life. So ruling (*hukm*) is equivalent to judgement (*qaḍāʾ*) in practice, even if it differs from it conceptually.

Now, a ruling or judgement is only effective to the extent that the one who issues it has the authority to do so. This authority must devolve to some form of sovereignty or guardianship, even if this simply means is that the disputing parties have appointed him to settle their quarrel. For example, if two persons take recourse to a third to resolve their dispute, they make him an arbitrator to judge between them and agree to adhere to whatever he decides. In this case, they have given authority to his opinion and promised their obedience to him in this matter, making him their guardian in this regard.

But God is the absolute sovereign and in truth there is no sovereign besides Him; everything that exists only exists through His being and whatever effect they may have is only by virtue of Him. So judgement and authority actually belong to him. He says:

…everything is perishable but He; His is the judgment, and to Him you shall be brought back. (28:88)

…surely God orders whatever He wills. (5:6)

…the truth is from your Lord. (3:60)

Now, God's ruling (*ḥukm*) is of two kinds: Either it is creative (*takwīnī*) which is when He actualizes effects (*musababbāt*) and make them subsist through their various competing causes (*asbāb*) by giving priority to what we call the "complete cause" (*sabab tāmm*) over all others. God says of Jacob: *…judgment is only God's; on Him do I rely…* (12:67). Or else, God's ruling is moral (*tashrīʿī*), such as the duties laid down in the Divine Religion relating to belief and practice. God says: *…judgment is only God's; He has commanded that you shall not serve aught but Him; this is the right religion…* (12:40).

There is also a third category of ruling which could be counted as belonging to either of the aforementioned categories in some way. This refers to God's judgement between His servants on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they disagreed. And this takes the form of Him making the truth plain and manifest on the Day of Resurrection to the people assembled so that they can witness it with certainty and see it with their own eyes. By this and its effects everyone who stood with the truth in this world is gladdened, while those who disdained it are made miserable because of their arrogance and its consequences. God says: *…so God shall judge between them on the day of resurrection in what they differ* (2:113). So people's disagreements in beliefs or actions are moral disagreements which can only be resolved by moral laws and rules. And were it not for these disagreements, there would be no need for a law, as God points out with His words: *people were a single nation; then God raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people in that in which they differed; and none but the very people who were given it differed about it after clear arguments had come to them, revolting among themselves; so God has guided by His will those who believe to the truth about which they differed and God guides whom He pleases to the right path* (2:213). Clearly, moral authority belongs to God, and He is the guardian in that. This means He alone should be taken as a guardian to be obeyed and worshipped through the religion he sends down. This is what God means when He says *And in whatever thing you disagree, the ruling thereof is to God….*

So, to summarize, this argument means that the guardian who is worshipped and obeyed must do several things: First, He must remove disagreements between those who take him as a guardian. Second, He must reform what is corrupt in their communities. And third, He must guide them towards eternal happiness through the religion he sends down for

them. The judgement in all of this belongs to God, so He is the only one worthy of being taken as a guardian.

Some, including Zamakhsharī in his *Kashshāf*, offer an alternate interpretation for the verse *And in whatever thing you disagree, the ruling thereof is to God.…* It is said: Here God is relating the words of the Prophet to the faithful, namely: In whatever matter of religion the faithless People of the Book and idolaters oppose you, and you disagree with them in, the judgement of that controversy rests with God. And this is the reward of the faithful who affirmed it and the punishment of those who denied it.

It is also said: It means whenever there is a legal dispute or disagreement between you, take it to Gods Messenger for arbitration, and do not prefer anyone else's judgement over his. As in God's saying: *if you quarrel about anything, refer it to God and the Messenger* (4:59).

It is said: It means whenever you disagree about the interpretation of a verse of the Qur'an, refer to the clear verses of God's Book to clarify it, and the apparent meaning of the *sunnah* of the Prophet.

And it is said: It means whenever you disagree about something that is not connected to your moral duties and you have no way of decisively ascertaining what is true, say "God knows best" (*allāhu aʿlam*) just as when God says concerning knowledge of the Spirit (*rūḥ*): *And they ask you about the soul. Say: The soul is one of the commands of my Lord, and you are not given aught of knowledge but a little* (17:85).

According to all of the above opinions, this verse refers to the speech of the Prophet, whether by relating something he has already said, or implying that God is commanding him to say it. But anyone who ponders on the context of the verses then examines the above interpretations will doubtless see that none of them suit this verse.

…that is God, my Lord, upon Him do I rely and to Him do I turn frequently: Here, God relates something from the speech of His Prophet. The demonstrative pronoun "that" (*dhālikum*) refers to the arguments just given for taking God as a guardian, and further emphasizes His guardianship being a corollary of His lordship.

Having presented conclusive proofs that He is the true guardian and there is none save him, God commands the Prophet to declare that this is God and, at the same time, to announce that he has taken Him as a guardian. He does this by acknowledging His lordship, which means mastery over the affairs of Creation (*mulk al-tadbīr*), which he follows with an explicit statement that he has taken Him as a guardian as a result of this,

namely: *upon Him do I rely and to Him do I turn frequently*.

This shows that the guardianship of lordship (*wilāyat al-rubūbiyyah*) is connected to the cosmic order (*niẓām al-takwīn*); through it, God governs the affairs of the universe and arranges the system of cause and effect in such a way that the intended creatures, such as the human being for example, are brought into being and sustained thereby. By a similar token, this same guardianship is connected to the moral order (*niẓām al-tashrīʿ*); through it, God organizes the affairs of human existence by promulgating laws and rules for people to follow and base their actions upon in their daily lives with the goal of attaining complete felicity.

From the cosmic aspect, taking God as a lord and a guardian means entrusting the matters of the universe to Him. This is by not placing one's hope in the apparent causes of things and relying solely on Him as the ultimate cause behind all causes. This is the meaning of relying on God (*tawakkul*). From the moral aspect, it means referring to His judgement in every situation we face in our daily lives. And this is the meaning of turning towards God frequently (*ināb*ah). So when God says, …*upon Him do I rely and to Him do I turn frequently*, this means that I go back to Him in all my affairs and it is an explicit statement that every issue, whether cosmic or moral, ultimately returns to Him.

فَاطِرُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ أَزْوَاجًا ۖ يَذْرَؤُكُمْ فِيهِ ۚ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ ۖ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ﴿١١﴾

(42:11) ***The Originator of the heavens and the earth; He made mates for you from among yourselves, and mates of the cattle too, multiplying you thereby; nothing like a likeness of Him; and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.***

Having announced that He is his Lord because of the conclusive proofs put forward for He alone being the Guardian, God follows on by putting forth further proofs in this verse and those that follow it for God alone being the Lord.

In short, the argument put forth is God created everything and originated it by bringing it forth from the silence of nothingness into existence; He made you as mates and thereby multiplied you, and He also made the

cattle mates and thereby multiplied them that you might benefit from them. This is the creation and arrangement of the cosmos. He is All-Hearing of the entreaties of His creation for their needs, and He meets each of their needs as they deserve. He is All-Seeing because He knows whatever deeds His creations perform, and He will recompense them for these. It is His hand that grasps the keys to the treasure-houses of the heavens and the earth, in which are stored those things whose properties and effects give rise to the visible order of things. And it is He who provides sustenance for the creatures; He expands and contracts this sustenance on the basis of His knowledge of that. All of these things pertain to governing the universe (*tadbīr al-ʿālam*), so He alone is the Lord who governs all affairs.

The Originator of the heavens and the earth… Meaning the one who brought them into being from the silence of nothingness by way of creation.

…He made mates for you from among yourselves… By creating male and female, through the union of which the human race could procreate and multiply.

…and mates of the cattle too… Meaning He made them as male and female also.

…multiplying you thereby… Meaning He made you numerous by making you in this fashion.

And the target of the address in *multiplying you* (yadhraʾukum) includes both human beings and cattle, by including the non-rational beings with the rational ones, as Zamakhsharī says.

…nothing is like a likeness of Him… Meaning nothing is a likeness of Him, and the use of a superfluous *like* (*ka*) is for emphasis, and this is a common convention of Arabic speech.

…and He is the Hearing, the Seeing: Meaning He hears the entreaties of His creatures and perceives their deeds. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, He says:

All those who are in the heavens and the earth ask of Him…. (55:29)
And He gives you of all that you ask Him…. (14:34)
…and God sees what you do. (57:4)

لَهُ مَقَالِيدُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

(42:12) ***His are the keys of the heavens and the earth; He expands and constrains the sustenance for whom He pleases; surely He is Cognizant of all things.***

By affirming that there are keys to the heavens and the earth, this suggests that they are treasure houses that contain the source of whatever phenomena and realities appear in the manifest universe.

He expands and constrains sustenance… Expanding sustenance means to make it ample, while narrowing it means to limit it. Sustenance (*rizq*) is whatever helps one to endure and removes his essential needs of subsistence.

Appending the phrase *…surely He is Cognizant of all things* to the verse alludes to the fact that sustenance is not increased or constrained at random or blindly. Rather, it is based on God's knowledge of everything; the sustenance of each creature is apportioned according to the divine knowledge of whatever this creature needs in its present state and whatever external conditions or situations are affecting it. This is Divine Wisdom. So God expands or restricts sustenance according to His wisdom.

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Verses 13–16

This third group of verses define revelation through its effect on the world and the teachings it contains; the one divine religion which all human beings must adopt as a way of life and a path that will lead them to felicity (*saʿādah*).

In this context, these verses make clear that the Muḥammadan Religion[1] (*al-sharīʿah al-muḥammadiyyah*) is the most comprehensive of all the divinely-revealed religions. They also show that whatever differences that occur in God's religion, despite its singularity, do not stem from the revelation itself. Rather, these differences stem from people's own audacity after having been given knowledge. And these verses make still other points which we shall refer to as we discuss them in sequence.

شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ ۖ أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ ۚ كَبُرَ عَلَى الْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ ۚ اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ ﴿١٣﴾

(42:13) ***He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Jesus and Moses and Jesus to maintain the religion and do not divide yourselves; severe to the idolaters is that which you call them to; God chooses for it whom He pleases, and guides to it him who turns [to Him], frequently.***

To "make plain a path" (*sharaʿa al-ṭarīq*) means to beat a clear and visible trail. Rāghib says:

"To enjoin" (*waṣiyyah*) means to exhort another to follow a course of action. They say "*arḍun wāṣiyyatun*" to mean a land covered in vegetation, and "*awṣāhu/waṣṣāhū*" to mean "I enjoined him."

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1 This expression here and elsewhere implies that it is the religion of Islam which was revealed to Prophet Muḥammad. (Pub.)

This word implies a sense of importance; not every command is "enjoined", only those which the one who enjoins deems to be of importance.

So when God says: *He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Noah…* this means he made clear those matters of religion, which is a way of life (*sunnat al-ḥayāt*), which Noah was given and charged with. From the context, it appears that the address here is directed to the Prophet and his community, and *what He enjoined upon Noah…* refers to Noah's religion.

The phrase *…and that which We have revealed to you…* clearly intends to draw a contrast between him and Noah to show that to the Prophet have been revealed teachings and laws exclusive to his own religion. God refers to this as "revelation" rather than "enjoining" because, as we have already mentioned, "enjoining" is only used in conjunction with matters of importance, namely beliefs and practices, and our Prophet's religion encompasses all matters, whether obvious or subtle, and contains both major and minor details. This is unlike other religions, which were confined to those matters most important in relation to the situation of their communities, and which accorded with the extent of their capacity.

The transition in *…and that which We have revealed…* from the third-person ("He") to the first-person ("We") signifies grandeur. This is because important persons speak *about* them, and *about* their servants and followers.

…and that which We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus… is conjoined with the phrase *…what He enjoined upon Noah……* and this means "what was made clear for each one of them." The order these prophets are mentioned in corresponds to the historical order in which they were sent; Noah came before Abraham, Abraham before Moses, and Moses before Jesus. Our Prophet is only mentioned before all of them out of honour and preference for him, as when God says: *And when We made a covenant with the prophets and with you, and with Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus, son of Mary…* (33:7). But then God follows with Noah to show that his religion is the oldest and longest-standing.

In this verse, we can observe a number of points.

First, insofar as the tone of the verse suggests that God is enumerating His blessings, especially when we look at the end of the verse and those that immediately follow it, this suggests that the Muḥammadan Religion encompasses all previous religions. This does not contradict the verse …

for each of you did We appoint a law and a way … (5:48) as the religion having a particular identity does not negate its universality.

Secondly, the only divine religions which are attributed to revelation are those of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. If there were any others, they would have been included here for the sake of the aforementioned universality.

The consequences of this are: First, there was no religion before Noah in the sense of laws governing human society in order to remove social disputes. And this has already been discussed briefly in our commentary on the verse …*people were a single nation; then God raised prophets*… (2:213).

Secondly, those prophets sent after Noah followed his religion until Abraham was sent; thereafter they followed Abraham's religion until Moses was sent, and so on and so forth.

Thirdly, the prophets who founded religions and were possessed of resolution (*ūlū al-ʿazm*) are the five mentioned in this verse. If there were any others, they would have been included here as well. So these are the leaders of the prophets and their pre-eminence amongst prophets is also demonstrated by the verse: *And when We made a covenant with the prophets and with you, and with Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus, son of Mary*… (33:7).

…to maintain the religion and do not divide yourselves…*To* here is explanatory; *maintain the religion* means to preserve it by following it and acting upon it; *the religion* takes the definite article to signify a particular religion (rather than religion in general), i.e. "maintain *this* religion that has been made clear for you"; and *do not divide yourselves* means to preserve the religion's unity by agreeing upon it and avoiding disagreements about it.

Because the religion was made clear for them, they were all commanded to follow it and act upon it without any difference between them. God expounds this by commanding them to maintain the religion and not divide themselves concerning it. So the point here is that they must all maintain the religion together and not become divided and segregated by only maintaining one part of it but not another. Maintaining the religion means believing in everything that God has sent down and acting upon what must be acted upon.

So all the religions that God sent down to His prophets are actually a single religion which must be maintained and in which division must be avoided. For the divine laws shared between them, which endure in

the form of the continuing moral duty to observe them, the meaning of "maintain" is obvious. However, as for the laws only laid down in some of these religions and abrogated by later religions, the reality of an abrogated law is that it is a law with a specific period of applicability amongst a particular group of people at a particular time in human history. Abrogation (*naskh*) simply means that this period has come to an end, not that the law is now false. God says: …*God speaks the truth and He guides to the way* (33:4). So an abrogated law is always true (*ḥaqq*), but it is only to be acted upon by a specific people at a specific time, while others need only believe in the truth it without acting upon it themselves. This is the meaning of maintaining and not being divided in this regard.

From the above, it is clear that the command to maintain the religion and not be divided therein—…*to maintain the religion and do not divide yourselves*…—is universal in its applicability and encompasses all people at all times.

From this is demonstrated the falsity of the claim made by some that the command to maintain the religion and not be divided only applies to those teachings shared between all the religions, rather than those particular to one of them. They say that these different rulings vary according to their respective nations and the condition of these nations.

We say this verse demonstrates the falsity of such a claim because there is nothing to qualify the categorical nature of the ordinance …*to maintain the religion and do not divide yourselves*…, whereas if it were as they suggested, then the command to maintain the religion would be restricted to the three principles of religion: Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), Prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and Resurrection (*maʿād*). As for other secondary teachings, we might not be able to find a single teaching shared from all angles between all of the different religions. And this is clearly rejected by the tenor of the statement *He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Noah*…, as well as by the verses:

And surely this religion of yours is one religion and I am your Lord, therefore be careful [of your duty] to Me. But they cut off their religion among themselves into sects, each part rejoicing in that which is with them. (23:52–53)

Surely the religion with God is Islam, and those to whom the Book had been given did not show opposition but after knowledge had come to them, out of spite among themselves.… (3:19)

…severe to the idolaters is that which you call them to… By *that which*

you call them to, God means the whole religion of Divine Unity which the Prophet would call them to, and not merely the principle of Divine Unity itself. This is made clear by the following verses. And it is *severe* (*kabur*) for the idolaters because it is difficult for them to accept it.

…God chooses for it whom He pleases, and guides to it him who turns [to Him], frequently… *Choose* (ijtibā) means "to gather and bring close", and the context suggests that the pronouns *hu* in the two instances of *for it* and *to it* (ilayh) here both refer to the same thing as *that which you call them to*. This means that God gathers and brings to the Religion of Divine Unity—which is *that which you call them to*—whomever of His servants He so wills and He guides to it whoever turns to Him frequently. So the entire phrase *…hard to the unbelievers is that which you call them to; God chooses for it whom He pleases, and guides to it he who turns [to Him], frequently* carries a similar meaning to the verse *He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion; the faith of your father Abraham* (22:78).

It is said that these pronouns (in *to it*) refer to God (that is, *to Him*) and there is no problem with this per se, but what we have mentioned above fits better. In both cases the phrase *God chooses for it whom He pleases…* is used to show He has no need for the arrogant idolaters to believe. This is like God's saying: *But if they are proud, then those with your Lord glorify Him during the night and the day, and they do not tire* (41:38).

It is also said that *what you call them to* means "what you call them to *believe in*", namely his own prophethood, and *God chooses for it whom He pleases…* onwards means the same as the verse *…God best knows where He places His message…* (6:124). But this goes against the apparent meaning of the verse under discussion.

وَمَا تَفَرَّقُوا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ
مِنْ رَبِّكَ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُورِثُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ
بَعْدِهِمْ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مُرِيبٍ ﴿١٤﴾

(42:14) ***And they did not become divided until after knowledge had come to them out of spite among themselves; and had not a word gone forth from your Lord till an appointed term, certainly judgment would have been given between them; and those who were made to inherit the Book after them are most surely in disquieting***

doubt concerning it.

They in *they did not become divided* refers to the people, as is understood from the context. *Spite* (baghī) means jealousy or enmity. It is qualified by the words *among themselves* (baynahum) to show that this was something that circulated amongst them. This means that, after they knew the truth, the people for whom the religion was made clear only became divided and disagreed because of feelings of enmity and envy that circulated amongst them.

This is the kind of disagreement in religion that leads to sectarianism and factionalism. Throughout His revelation, God attributes this to spite. As for the disagreements that call for revelation to be sent down, namely disagreements in the affairs of daily life and division in societal matters, these stem from people's differing temperaments and goals. In fact, the very reason for which revelation is sent down and religions are promulgated is to resolve such disagreements, as alluded to by God's words, which we have already discussed: *…people were a single nation; then God sent prophets…* (2:213).

…and had not a word gone forth from your Lord till an appointed term, certainly judgment would have been given between them… Here, *a word* means something similar to what God says when Adam descended to the earth: *…and there is for you in the earth an abode and a provision for a time….* This means that were it not for the fact that God decreed that they would abide on the earth and enjoy provision therein for a specified time, then the matter would have been decided as soon as they became divided in their religion and deviated from God's path, and they would have surely perished as a result of this grievous sin!

One might argue: "But God *has* judged and punished, just as He relates in the stories of Noah, Hūd, and Ṣāliḥ! Doesn't God say: *And every nation had an apostle; so when their apostle came, the matter was decided between them with justice…* (10:47)?"

The answer to this is that the instances in which God judges and punishes people have only been when communities living at the time of prophets rejected them. But we are discussing this phrase *…and had not a word gone forth from your Lord….* And this refers to communities after their prophets left them, as is clear from the context.

…and those who were made to inherit the Book after them are most surely in disquieting doubt concerning it: *Them* in *after them* refers to those

who became divided *after knowledge had come to them out of spite amongst themselves*; these are the early generations of a religious community. *Those who were made to inherit the book after them* are their descendants and the succeeding generations. So this verse shows that those who began the disagreements and laid the foundations for division knew what the truth was, but they only did what they did out of spite. However, their descendants inherited the Book from them and were in a state of utter doubt with regards to it.

What we have said about this verse's meaning is derived from its own tone and context. Other commentators have offered a multitude of opinions which there is no point in detailing and rebutting here. Interested readers can refer to their books for more details.

فَلِذَٰلِكَ فَادْعُ ۖ وَاسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ ۖ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ ۖ وَقُلْ آمَنْتُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ كِتَابٍ ۖ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَعْدِلَ بَيْنَكُمُ ۖ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ ۖ لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ ۖ لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ ۖ اللَّهُ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا ۖ وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٥﴾

(42:15) ***To this then go on inviting, and go on steadfastly on the right way as you are commanded, and do not follow their whims, and say: I believe in what God has revealed of the Book, and I am commanded to do justice between you: God is our Lord and your Lord; we shall have our deeds and you shall have your deeds; no proof need there be between us and you: God brings us together, and to Him is the return.***

This follows logically from what God says above about making a single religion clear for all the prophets and their nations, and before dividing them into the early generations (who knowingly differed concerning the religion out of spite) and later generations (who were in doubt about what they had inherited of the Book). In other words, because He made clear to you everything He made clear to those before you, you must invite others to your way. And because of what He said about some dividing out of spite, and others being in doubt, you must go aright as you are commanded and not follow their whims.

The *lām* in *for this* (li-dhalika) is to signify a cause (*taʿlīl*). It is also said that this *lām* also means "to" (*ilā*), meaning "to the religion that has

been made clear for you."

And go aright as you are commanded…—"going aright" (*istiqāmah*) means—as Rāghib has mentioned—to stick to the right path. The phrase *and do not follow their whims* serves as an explanation of this.

…and say: I believe in what God has revealed of the Book… This makes all of the divine scriptures equal from the aspect of believing in them and having faith in them; these are the books that God has sent down containing the teachings of His religions.

…and I am commanded to do justice between you… This makes all people equal from the aspect of inviting them and directing them towards what God has revealed of the Religion.

And it is said that the *lām* in *to do justice between you* (li aʿdilu baynakum) is for causation, meaning "I have been commanded with these things in order for me to do justice between you." In the same vein, it is said that the meaning of "justice" (*ʿadl*) is justice in governing. And it is said: "to do justice in judging between you." Other interpretations are also offered, but all of these are very unlikely because they are not supported by the context of the verses under discussion.

…God is our Lord and your Lord… This explains the reason why God has said all books and religions are to be believed in equally, and that all people are to be called to the Religion equally. Namely, that its teachings encompass all of them. And this is why this phrase interjects rather than being added with a conjunction such as "and."

When God says *God is our Lord and your Lord*, this shows that the One God is the Lord of all. People do not have many different lords, such that each group is attached to their own lord, preferring their own over all others, and each believing only in their own lord's religion. Rather God is the Lord of all, and all are His servants and subjects. It is His commands that manage their lives, and the religions He sent down to His prophets that they follow. So no one has any occasion to believe in one of them but not any other, just as the Jews believe in the religion of Moses but no other, or the Christians believe in the religion of Jesus but not that of Muḥammad. Instead, it is obligatory to believe in every revealed scripture and to believe that they are all from God.

…we shall have our deeds and you shall have your deeds… This indicates that even if people's deeds differ as to whether they are good or bad, and as to whether they are rewarded or punishment, these deeds do not belong to anyone except the one who does them. Each and every person

owns what he does; none shall benefit from the deeds of others, nor shall they be harmed by the deeds of others. So he should not prefer one person to benefit from his deeds or put off another to avoid being harmed by his. Of course, there is a ranking of deeds according to the levels of those who do them, but that is for God when He holds His servants to account. It is not for human beings—whether the Prophet or anyone else, all of whom are God's servants and subjects—to determine this. And when He holds His servants to account, no person will have nothing from another. This is what God mentions in Noah's debate with his people: *They said: Shall we believe in you while the lowest follow you? He said: And what knowledge have I of what they do? Their account is only with my Lord, if you could perceive*. (27:111–113)

And also when He tells the Prophet: …*neither are you answerable for any reckoning of theirs, nor are they answerable for any reckoning of yours*… (6:56).

When God says …*no proof need there be between us and you*…, this could mean that there is no proof indicating that one group of us has priority over the other in that which is between us, such that one group could use it to argue against the other.

By negating proof, it could also mean to negate its logical corollary; namely an argument. This would mean "no argument need there be between us and you because of our different ranks; our Lord is One and, insofar as we are all His servants, we are one too. Each person shall have what he has done, so there is no argument right now until there is proof one way or the other."

From here it becomes clear that there is no validity to the interpretation some offer for this sentence: that there is no need for proof or arguments because the truth is so obvious that it is not necessary to offer arguments for it, and any disagreement that remains is only because of arrogance and obstinacy. This is because the context of the present discussion is what the Prophet has been commanded with regards to himself and his community of the practice of treating equally (*taswiyah*), not with regards to proving any fundamental teachings. So we do not need to understand "proof" in the way these commentators have.

…God brings us together… Here, *us* encompasses both the *us* and *you* in the previous sentences, and by *brings together* it means to bring them together in Lordship as He is the lord of all and all are His servants. Hence, *God brings us together* affirms what was said before; *God is our Lord and*

your Lord. It also prepares the way for the statement *…and to Him is the return*. From these two sentences we grasp that God is our source, because He is the Lord of us all, and He is also our destination because we return to Him. So none of us has any creator except Him!

At first glance, it would seem more appropriate to say: "God is my Lord and your Lord, I have my deeds and you have your deeds. There is no proof between me and you…" because of the previous statements: *I believe…* and *I am commanded…* where the first-person singular is used. However, the first-person plural is used instead. This is because God says previously: *He has made plain to you* [plural] *of the religion what He enjoined upon Noah…* He also says: *God chooses for it whom He pleases, and guides to it he who turns [to Him], frequently* which indicates that there are a group of people who believe in what the Prophet believes, who respond to his invitation and follow his religion.

So the first-person plural in *our Lord*, *we shall have our deeds* and *between us* refers to the Prophet and those who believe in him. Meanwhile, the second-person plural pronouns *your Lord*, *your deeds* and *between us and you* refer to all other people, whether idolaters or People of the Book. This conforms with the verse, elsewhere: *Say: O followers of the Book! Come to a common word between us and you that we shall not serve any but God and [that] we shall not associate aught with Him, and [that] some of us shall not take others for lords besides God; but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims* (3:64).

وَالَّذِينَ يُحَاجُّونَ فِي اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا اسْتُجِيبَ لَهُ حُجَّتُهُمْ دَاحِضَةٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَعَلَيْهِمْ غَضَبٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ ﴿١٦﴾

(42:16) ***And (as for) those who dispute about God after that obedience has been rendered to Him, their plea is null with their Lord, and upon them is wrath, and for them is severe punishment.***

"Argument" (*ḥujjah*) means to speak with the goal of affirming a proposition or refuting it. It is derived from the word *ḥajj*, meaning "destination." "Null" (*dahḍ*) means false and ephemeral.

Based on what has been said, this means that those who dispute about God—meaning those who argue against His lordship or try to refute His religion—after people have responded to Him and entered His religion because of the clear proofs and arguments in its favour, their arguments

are invalid and do not hold any sway with their Lord. His wrath is upon them, and they shall have a painful punishment.

The apparent meaning of "responding to him" (*istijāba lahu*) means truly responding and accepting it on the basis of knowledge without any doubts, as a sound conscience demands. This is because the teachings of the religion chime with human nature and anyone who has a living heart will respond positively to them. God says:

Only those accept who listen; and [as to] the dead, God will raise them…. (6:36)

And the soul and Him Who fashioned it, then inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it…. (91:7–8)

Then set your face upright for religion in the right state— the nature made by God in which He has made men. (30:30)

In short, the verse means that those who dispute about God or His religion after human nature has responded to it or after people have responded to it on account of their healthy human natures, their arguments are invalid and ephemeral in the eyes of their Lord. His wrath is upon them and there awaits them a punishment so severe that they cannot imagine it.

This interpretation is supported to some extent by the tone of the above verses, as these describe God making clear a religion, enjoining it upon the prophets and choosing whichever servants He wishes to be drawn to it. So, on the basis of the above verses, there can be no disputing that God has a religion which He has chosen for His servants, and any argument to the contrary is necessarily void. Perhaps on this basis we can say that God's words *God it is Who revealed the Book with truth, and the balance* explain the reason for their argument's falsity. We invite the reader to reflect upon this.

It is said: The verse *when He has been responded to* means the Messenger, and those who responded to him were the People of the Book. And this means that they confessed that descriptions and prophecies of him can be found in their scriptures. So this means they disputed about him after admitting they knew him, and thus their argument was invalid.

And it is said: *When He has been responded to* means the Messenger and the one who responded to him was God, meaning that God answered his supplications against the leaders of the Quraysh when they were slain in the Battle of Badr, as well as his supplications against the people of Mecca when God tried them with drought and famine, and his supplications for the dispossessed when God delivered them from the hands of

the Quraysh, and other such miracles.

However, both of the above meanings do not fit the context of the verses.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, about the verse *And [as for] those who dispute about God…*, it is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās and Mujāhid:
This verse was revealed about a group of the Jews who tried to turn people away from Islam and misguide them by saying: "Our scripture came before your scripture and our prophet came before your prophet, so our religion is better than yours!" Or, according to another narration: "…so we are more entitled to God than you!"

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mundhir narrates from ʿIkrimah:
When the verse, *When there comes the help of God and the victory…* (110:1) was revealed, the idolaters in Mecca said to the faithful who were amongst them: "People have entered God's religion in droves, so get out from amongst us, why are you still here with us?" Then the verse was revealed, *And [as for] those who dispute about God….*

Author's comments: The meaning of the verse does not match with what the narration says, as there is no real disputation in the story. The same applies to the first account, in that it does not explain the words *after He has been responded to*.

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Verses 17-26

This fourth group of verses define divine revelation by saying that the religion revealed thereby is in the form of a scripture written for the people, and a balance in which deeds are weighed. It is on the basis of these two things that people will be recompensed on the Day of Resurrection, and a good recompense is divine provision (*rizq*). Then the conversation shifts to discuss what kinds of reward and punishment await people on the Day of Resurrection. Also in this section is the verse enjoining affection for the Prophet's near relatives (*āyat al-mawaddah fī al-qurbā*) and everything associated with that.

اللَّهُ الَّذِى أَنْزَلَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ وَالْمِيزَانَ ۗ وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّ السَّاعَةَ قَرِيبٌ ﴿١٧﴾

(42:17) ***God it is Who revealed the Book with truth, and the balance. And what will make you comprehend that perhaps the Hour is nigh?***

Each of the previous groups of verses began with a verb relating to the divine revelation, its goal and its effects:

The first group began: *Thusly does God, the Mighty, the Wise, <u>reveal</u> to you…*

The second began: *And thus have We <u>revealed</u> to you an Arabic Qur'an…*

And the third began: *He has <u>made plain</u> to you of the religion…*

However, the tone at the beginning of this section differs. It begins with a nominal (rather than a verbal) sentence that attributes to God the sending down of the Book and the Balance: *God <u>it is</u> Who revealed the Book…* and this implies that revelation is defined as sending down the Book and the Balance with it.

Perhaps the reason for this is the disputation mentioned in the last verse of the previous section, when God said: *And [as for] those who dispute about God…* In other words, this called for God to introduce Himself to *those who dispute* and say that He is the One who sent down

the Book with truth and the Balance. As you can see, this serves to define divine revelation according to its effects.

In any case, by *the Book* (kitāb) God means the revelation containing the teachings of the religion that are meant to govern human society. We have already seen in our commentary on the verse *People were a single nation; so God raised prophets…* (2:213) that this is what God means when He says *the Book* in the Qur'an. And sending it down *with truth* (bi al-ḥaqq) means He has sent it down accompanying the truth, without it being contaminated by any Satanic inspirations or selfish contradictions.

A *balance* (mīzān) is something used to weigh and measure things. In the context of this verse and the one after it, it refers to the religion contained in the Book. This is because all human beliefs and actions are measured according to it; they are accounted for and their recompense is given according to it on the Day of Resurrection. So the Balance is the religion in its totality, encompassing both its roots (*uṣūl*) and branches (*furūʿ*). This understanding is supported by the verse, *Certainly We sent Our apostles with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance…* (57:25), as indicated by the apparent meaning of the words *with them*.

It is said: *The Balance* means justice. It is called "the balance" because a balance is a tool for fairness and equity between people, and justice is like this too. This is supported by the mention of justice previously in the verse: *I am commanded to do justice between you* (42:15).

However, there is no indication of this expressed in the verse. Moreover, we have already seen that the meaning of "justice" in *I am commanded to do justice…* is to treat people equally in calling them to Islam and in the context of applying its teachings to their lives. It does not refer to justice in governance or arbitration.

It is said: It means the common balance scale used for weights and measures.

And it is said: It means the Prophet. Perhaps this interpretation can be reconciled with what we have already said in that the Prophet is the perfect example of the religion in faith and practice. So each individual believer has a beautiful religion to the extent that his religion resembles that of the Prophet. However, this does not accord very well with the verse of Sūrat al-Ḥadīd we just mentioned.

And what will make you comprehend that perhaps the Hour is nigh?

Insofar as the Balance symbolizes accounting and recompense, it also

alludes to resurrection and judgement. It is to this matter that the discourse now turns, warning some people about what terrors await them, while giving glad tidings of what is promised to the righteous.

"To make comprehend" (*idrā*ʾ) means "to inform" (*iʿlām*).

"The Hour" (*al-sāʿah*)—according to what has been said—refers to "the coming of the Hour", which is why its predicate ("near") is grammatically masculine.[1] And this means: What will make you understand that perhaps the coming of the Hour is near? This verse is addressed to the Prophet[2] insofar as he is the listener but it encompasses everyone who hears it, so the warning and threat it contains are general as well.

يَسْتَعْجِلُ بِهَا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهَا ۖ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مُشْفِقُونَ مِنْهَا وَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهَا الْحَقُّ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُمَارُونَ فِي السَّاعَةِ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿١٨﴾

(42:18) ***Those who do not believe in it would hasten it on, and those who believe are anxious about it, and they know that it is the truth. Now most surely those who dispute obstinately concerning the hour are in a great error.***

By "hasten it on", God refers to the derisive urging of the Prophet to call down the punishment upon them. The Qur'an repeatedly relates their words: *And they say: When will this threat come about, if you are truthful?* (10:48).

Anxiety (*ishfāq*) is a kind of fear. Rāghib says:

"Anxiety" signifies concern mixed with fear, because the one who is anxious loves the one who he is anxious about, but also fears what might become of him. God says: *they are anxious about the hour* (21:49). If the particle "about" (*min*) is attached to it, then the aspect of fear is more apparent. And if the particle "for" (*fī*) is attached, then that of concern is clearer. God says: *Surely we were anxious before for our families* (52:26), and God says: …*those who believe are anxious about it* (42:18).

1 The word for "Hour" (*sāʿah*) is grammatically feminine, so the predicate "near" should also be feminine—*qarīb<u>ah</u>*. However, here it appears masculine (*qarīb*), suggesting that it refers to the coming of the Hour rather than the Hour itself. [Trans.]

2 Because the second-person pronoun is grammatically singular. [Trans.]

Now most surely those who dispute obstinately concerning the hour are in a great error: "To dispute obstinately" (*mumārah*) means to persist in arguing, and this refers to their constant denial of the Hour. They are described as being in *a great error* (ḍalāl baʿīd) because they have erred in their way of life when finding the right way to live is the most important thing imaginable to the human being. Because they imagine that this fleeting of theirs is all they have, they spend it immersed in worldly pleasures, when they should be this life to prepare for their eternal life in the Hereafter. But they have strayed from the path of good sense and so fallen into the path of error.

اللَّهُ لَطِيفٌ بِعِبَادِهِ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۖ وَهُوَ الْقَوِيُّ الْعَزِيزُ ﴿١٩﴾

(42:19) ***God is gracious*** **(laṭīf)** ***to His servants; He gives sustenance to whom He pleases, and He is the Strong, the Mighty.***

The word "grace" (*luṭf*) conveys a sense of care, ease, and precision. So if someone does something requiring precision with care and ease, he is considered "gracious" (*laṭīf*), just like the air which fills the subtle openings of physical bodies with ease and gentleness of touch.[1] Now, if we banish the physical implications of the word, then it is fitting to apply it to God; He apprehends the subtleties of matters because of His all-encompassing knowledge, and He acts upon them however He wills with precision and care, so He is *laṭīf*.

This verse predicates sustenance (*rizq*) and God's being gracious (*laṭīf*) to His servants, as well as strong and mighty. This shows that when God wishes to provide for someone, His grace means that they never escape His notice, His strength means He is never unable to provide for them, and His might means nothing can prevent Him from providing for them.

"Sustenance" here includes the gift of faith, which He bestows on whomsoever He wishes from amongst His servants (as we have seen in the verses above), and that is why He mentions it after His saying: *God it is Who revealed the Book with truth, and the balance…*

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الْآخِرَةِ نَزِدْ لَهُ فِي حَرْثِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ

1 This is because *laṭīf* in Arabic means both "gracious" and "subtle." [Trans.]

الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ نَصِيبٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

(42:20) ***Whoever desires the tillage of the Hereafter, We will enhance for him his tillage, and whoever desires the tillage of the world, We will give to him thereof, but he will have no share in the Hereafter.***

This means whoever strives for worldly goals and only desires the result in this life rather than the Hereafter, We will grant him some worldly gains but He shall have no share in the Hereafter. Using the word "tillage" (*ḥarth*) alludes to the fact that one must work for their goals, whether in this world or the Hereafter, as God says: *nothing belongs to man except what he strives for* (53:39).

And God has left what He will give him in this world ambiguous by saying *We will give to him thereof*, indicating that this matter depends on the Divine Will; perhaps He will expand his sustenance and perhaps He will contract it, as God says: *Whoever desires this transitory life, We expedite for him therein whatever We wish, for whomever We desire* (17:18).

The transition here from speaking in the third-person (*God is gracious…*) to the first-person plural (*We will enhance…, We will give…*) signifies the grandeur which is conveyed by God describing Himself as *…the Strong, the Mighty* in the previous verse.

These two verses tell us that God is gracious to all His servants; He is also almighty and all-powerful. He provides for His servants however He wills; for those who desire the Hereafter and strive for it, He has willed to provide for them thereof and increase it for them. Whereas for those who only desire this world and strive for it, He has willed to give them something from it while saying they have no share in the Hereafter.

From the above it becomes clear that the first verse is general, encompassing both groups that are mentioned in the second. The meaning of "servants" (*ʿibād*) includes all the inhabitants of this world and the Hereafter, as does sustenance (*rizq*). Meanwhile, the second verse serves to expand upon the general statement contained in the first: *He gives sustenance to whom He pleases.*

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ شَرَعُوا لَهُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا لَمْ يَأْذَنْ بِهِ اللَّهُ ۚ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةُ الْفَصْلِ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١﴾

(42:21) ***Do they have partners [besides God] who have ordained for them a religion which has not been permitted by God? Had it not been for the conclusive word, the decision would have been made between them; and surely the unjust shall have a painful punishment.***

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So far, we have read that it is God who sent down the Book with truth and made clear for them the religion that is the measure of their deeds; that it is only by God's grace, strength, and might that He provides for those who desire the Hereafter and strive for it, and increases their share thereof; and that those who desire this world but forget the Hereafter have no share in it. This shows that whoever disbelieves in the Hereafter shall have no share in it. This is because they deny that there is no other religion for them to follow except the one God has made clear so that they can earn sustenance like that of the faithful in the Hereafter by acting on it, for God has no partner who can promulgate a religion other than His without His leave. So the only religion is God's religion, and only those who follow it will receive pleasant sustenance in the Hereafter.

So when God says *Do they have partners…?* this is a rhetorical question which repudiates this. When God says, *Had it not been for the conclusive word, the decision would have been made between them*, this refers to the fact that God had already given His word that they could dwell on this earth until a fixed time. The tone of this sentence magnifies their culpability and sinfulness.

And when God says, *and surely the unjust shall have a painful punishment,* this threatens them with punishment on account of their wrongdoing and implies that they cannot escape him; even if He does not judge between them and punish them in this world, they shall still have a painful punishment in the Hereafter.

تَرَى الظَّالِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا وَهُوَ وَاقِعٌ بِهِمْ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا
الصَّالِحَاتِ فِي رَوْضَاتِ الْجَنَّاتِ ۖ لَهُمْ مَا يَشَاءُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ
الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٢٢﴾

(42:22) ***You will see the unjust anxious on account of what they have earned, and it must befall them; and those who believe and do good shall be in the meadows of the gardens; they shall have***

what they please with their Lord: that is the great grace.

"You" refers to the Prophet insofar as he is the listener, but it encompasses everyone who hears this verse and is capable of seeing. "The unjust" (*ẓālimīn*) here means those who forsake the religion which God made clear for His servants and those who ignore the Hour. So this means "Anyone with sight will see the unjust anxious on the Day of Resurrection on account of the evil deeds they have acquired, but it will certainly befall them and they have no escape from it."

This is one of the verses which clearly state the people's deeds will be given a physical reality on the Day of Resurrection (*tajassum al-aʿmāl*). It is said that the implicit meaning is that they are anxious about the *burden* of what they have earned, but there is no need for such an interpretation.

…and those who believe and do good shall be in the meadows of the gardens… In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> A meadow (*rawḍah*) is a green land with lush vegetation, while a garden (*jannah*) is a land surrounded by trees. So the meadows of the gardens [in Paradise] are green gardens surrounded by rows of trees.

…they shall have what they please with their Lord… In other words, the system of cause and effect works differently there. In fact, the only cause needed for anything is their willing it, then God will create for them whatever they desire with Himself. *That is the great grace*.

ذَٰلِكَ الَّذِي يُبَشِّرُ اللَّهُ عِبَادَهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ۗ قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ ۗ وَمَنْ يَقْتَرِفْ حَسَنَةً نَزِدْ لَهُ فِيهَا حُسْنًا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(42:23) ***That is of which God gives the good news to His servants, those who believe and do good deeds. Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives"; and whoever earns good, We give him more of good therein; surely God is Forgiving, Grateful.***

These are glad tidings for the righteous believers. They are described as "*His* servants" to honour them.

Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives." The thing which he does not ask any reward for is conveying the

message of Islam and calling people towards it. God has related the same statement from a number of prophets who came before him, like Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Jethro, which they directed to their own peoples. For one example, see: *I do not ask you any reward for it; my reward lies only with the Lord of all the worlds.* (26:109).

This has also been said about the Prophet elsewhere: *You do not ask them any reward for it*… (12:104). And the Prophet is commanded to tell people that in various ways:

Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it." (38:86)

Say, "Whatever reward I may have asked you is for your own good. My reward lies only with God…." (34:48)

Say, "I do not ask you any recompense for it. It is just an admonition for all the nations." (6:90)

The verse suggests that the reason he asks no reward is because it is an admonition for all the nations; it is not for some people but not others such that he could ask for a reward.

Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it, except that anyone who wishes should take the way to his Lord." (25:57)

When we commented on this verse previously, we said that this meant "save that one of you wishes to take a way to his Lord by answering my call by your own free will. That is my reward. So there is nothing here for me besides calling you to the truth—that is there is no reward."

In this sūrah, God says: *Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives."* This makes the reward for conveying his message the love of his near relatives. And we can be sure from the meaning of the other verses in this regard that this love is something that goes back to accepting his message, either as a whole or just that part which is concerned with it. In any case, this appears to be a continuous exception (*istithnāʾ muṭṭaṣil*), meaning that this love is a reward connected to his preaching. There is no need for the arduous interpretations which try to read this as a discontinuous one (*istithnāʾ munqaṭiʿ*).[1]

1 The difference between a continuous and discontinuous exception is that in the former the excepted belongs to the same category as the generality, example, "All the people came except Zayd." In the latter, however the excepted is not in the same category as the generality, example, "The angels prostrated except for Iblīs" (as Iblīs is not an angel). In this case, the question is whether or not the love of the near relatives counts as a reward for conveying God's message. [Trans.]

As for the meaning of *love of my near relatives*, commentators have offered differing interpretations:

It is said—and this is attributed to the masses—that this statement is addressed to the Quraysh, and the reward requested is their love for the Prophet because of his family connection to them. This is because they denied him and hated him after, according to some accounts, he challenged their idols. In response, he was commanded to ask them: If they will not believe in him, then let them at least show affection to him because of his relationship with them and avoid hating or harassing him. So in this interpretation, "near relatives" (*qurbā*) is a verbal noun in the meaning of "nearness" (*qirābah*) and "*of*" (*fī*) is causal.[1]

However, something can only be called a "reward" (*ajr*) if it is being offered in return for some work that has benefited the one giving it, and if it is a recompense given to the doer of that work in the form of money or something else. So it makes no sense for the Prophet to ask the Quraysh for any reward while they were denying him and disbelieving in his message. This only makes sense on the assumption whoever he was addressing believed in him; if they denied his message and disbelieved in him, then they haven't taken anything from him to warrant a reward! And, if they did believe in him—prophethood being one of the three fundamental tenets of the religion—then it is impossible to imagine them hating him in order for him to ask them to love him in recompense for conveying the message!

In short, it is senseless to ask for a reward if those being asked did not believe, and it is inconceivable that those being asked hated the Prophet if they believed in him, in which case he would not need to ask for their affection.

This objection applies even if we assume the exception *save for* is a discontinuous exception, as the only situation in which it is conceivable to ask for a reward from them is if they already believe. But whatever follows a discontinuous exception must be distinct from the generality in every aspect, so reflect on this.

It is also said: *Love for my near relatives* means the same as above[2] and it is addressed to the Anṣār. It is said they brought him money to help

1 In which case, the proper translation would be: "…save for love on account of my kinship with you." [Trans.]

2 See the translation in the previous note. [Trans.]

him in his difficulties but then the verse came down so he refused it, and he had a relative amongst them in the form of Salmā bt. Zayd al-Najjārī, and through his mother's brothers according to some accounts.

However the fact that the Anṣār loved the Prophet is beyond doubt, for they are the ones who invited him to come and live with them and provided a house for him. It was they who laid down their lives, their property, and their sons for him; they gave everything they had to help him, even in generosity to those believers who came to them with him. God even praises them in such glowing terms as *and those who were settled in the land and [abided] in faith before them, who love those who migrate toward them, and do not find in their chests any need for that which is given to them, but prefer [the Emigrants] to themselves, though poverty be their own lot* (59:9). This is the extent of their love not just for the Prophet, but for those who emigrated for the sake of the Prophet. So who could doubt their love?

So, considering the extent of their love, why should the Prophet be commanded to ask them for their love because of his somewhat distant connection to them through his womenfolk, while the Arabs in those days did not give much weight to relations through women. They would say: "Our children are the sons of our sons. Our daughter's children are the children of strangers."

And they would say: "People's mothers only carry them for a while, their bloodlines are from their fathers."

It was only with the advent of Islam that women were considered in family ties and the children of daughters were put on an equal footing with those of sons, as we have already discussed elsewhere.

It is said: It is addressed to the Quraysh, and *love for my near relatives* means "love because of kinship" except this means the love of the Prophet rather than that of the Quraysh. As in the first interpretation, above, the exception is discontinuous and resultant meaning is: "I do not ask of you any reward for the guidance I call you to, which will take you to the gardens of Paradise and grant you eternal life therein. Nor do I seek any recompense. It is only my love of you because of our kinship that motivates me to guide you to it."

However, this interpretation does not fit with what God tells him elsewhere about calling people towards guidance. On numerous occasions throughout the Qur'an, He makes clear that the matter of guiding people is only in God's hands and the Prophet has no influence in this

matter. He should not be saddened by their faithlessness or their rejection of his message, his only job is to convey it to them. So he should not be motivated to guide anyone because he loves them, or to neglect others out of enmity or dislike. And with all of this in mind, it is inconceivable that God would command His Prophet to tell the disbelievers of the Quraysh *Say: I do not ask you…* if this meant that he was only motivated to guide them out of the love he felt for them as his relatives rather than because of any reward he expected!

It is said: *Love for my near relatives* means love of near relations generally and this is addressed to either the Quraysh or to everyone. It means: "I do not ask you any reward for my preaching save that you love your near relatives."

But Islam does not teach that people should love their near relations unconditionally. God says: *You will not find a people believing in God and the Last Day endearing those who oppose God and His Messenger even though they were their own parents, or children, or brothers, or kinsfolk. [For] such, He has written faith into their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him.* (58:66) Moreover the context of this verse means that we cannot simply qualify it to mean only believing near relatives, as this does not fit with the fact that it is addressing the Quraysh or people as a whole.

Rather, the tone of the verse indicates that Islam teaches people to love for the sake of God without any preference for near relatives. Yes, there is a strong emphasis on the matter of near relations and womb relatives, but this falls under the rubric of maintaining relations (*ṣilat al-raḥm*) and giving money because of His love for relations, not under the rubric of "love for near relations" (*muwaddat al-qurbā*); all love is for the sake of God.

Nor is there any basis to say that love for near relations refers to maintaining relations or kindness toward them by giving money. This is because there is nothing in the text to indicate that the intended meaning is the literal meaning (*maʿnā ḥaqīqī*) which does not accord with the teachings of Islam about loving for the sake of God.

It is said: The meaning of *qurbā*[1] is actually "seeking nearness to God" (*taqarrub*), so the love of *qurbā* means to show one's love for God through obedience and worship. In which case the verse means "I ask

1 Translated as "near relatives" above. [Trans.]

you not reward for it save that you show your love for God by seeking nearness to Him."

However, this introduces ambiguity the phrase "Except the love of *qurbā*". It cannot have been addressing the idolaters because they did not reject seeking nearness to God or expressing their love of Him, in fact they saw their own worship of idols to be a form of seeking nearness to Him. The Qur'an quotes them as saying: *We only worship them so that they may bring us near to God* (39:3) and: *These are our intercessors with God.* (10:18)

Such an interpretation is deeply problematic as it would entail the Prophet asking the idolaters to show their love for God by seeking nearness to Him, without properly qualifying this statement to mean "by worshipping Him alone." And this ambiguous request would be directed to those who see associating partners with God as a kind of love and seeking nearness to Him. Yet the context of this statement is supposed to demonstrate the Prophet's sincerity in calling them to the Religion of Divine Unity by never asking them for a reward in exchange. So this is something no one with good sense can accept.

Insofar as the verse uses the word *mawaddah* ("affection") rather than *tawaddud* ("showing affection"), it means their love for God in seeking nearness to Him. But nowhere in the Qur'an does God use the word *mawaddah* to denote human love for God, even though it appears in the opposite sense (that is, God's love for human beings), as in the verses:

My Lord is indeed all-merciful, all-affectionate. (11:90)

And He is the All-forgiving, the All-affectionate. (85:14)

Perhaps the reason for this is that the word *mawaddah* conveys a sense of doting on the object of affection. Some even say, according to what Rāghib has recorded, that God's *mawaddah* for His servants means His watching over them.

And our prior objection stands even if we interpret *mawaddah fī al-qurbā* to mean people's affection for one another and their love for seeking nearness to God, in the sense that the things that bring them closer to God also cause love and affection between them. This is because the idolaters enjoy the same relations amongst themselves according to what they believe.

It is said: *Love of my near relatives* means the love of the Prophet's near relatives, namely the progeny (*ʿitrah*) from his household (*ahl al-bayt*), and numerous narrations have come down from both Sunni and

Shiʿi sources stating that this means to love them and be loyal to them. This is further supported by *mutawātir* narrations[1] from both sects that consider love and loyalty to the Prophet's Household a religious obligation.

When we look at all the narrations which have been transmitted by both sects from the Prophet instructing people to refer to his Household (*ahl al-bayt*) to understand the Book of God and its teachings, such as *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*[2], *Ḥadīth al-Safīnah*[3] and others, these leave no room for doubt that loving them is a religious obligation. Making their love the Prophet's reward (*ajr*) for conveying God's message was only to guarantee that people would refer to them because of the preeminent religious knowledge. From this it should be clear that the command to love them as a reward for the Prophet conveying his message had no purpose behind it save ensuring that this message would endure and continue after the Prophet. So this verse does not contradict the other verses which negate the asking of any reward.

In this case, the meaning of the verse becomes: "I do not ask you any reward for it except that God has enjoined you to love the faithful, amongst whom are my near relatives. I consider your love for my relatives worship, and I consider it a reward for my conveying this message to you." God says: *Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds the All-beneficent will endear them* (19:96). And God says: *But the faithful, men and women, are comrades of one another*…. (9:71)

This clearly refutes the argument of those who say such a request does not befit the position of prophethood because of the suspicion it begets; most of those who seek worldly gain will do something good and then ask for a reward that benefits their children and relatives, or that it contradicts the verse: *You do not ask them any reward for it*… (12:104).

This is because the verse only calls this a "reward" (*ajr*) with regards to the invitation to Islam, whereas in reality this verse does not add anything to what the other verses have said about not asking for a reward—

1 *Mutawātir*: A narration with so many independent chains of narration that there is no possibility that it could have been fabricated.

2 The tradition: "I am leaving amongst you two weighty things (*thaqalayn*), the Book of God and my progeny of the People of my Household."

3 The tradition: "The similitude of my Household is like that of Noah's Ark; whoever boards it will be saved, and whoever forsakes it will perish."

as you can see. Moreover, this does not bring any benefit to his near relatives so there is no basis for suspicion.

Furthermore, this verse was revealed in Medina and addresses the Muslims there; how could they harbour any suspicions about what their Prophet brings them from their Lord when they believed in him and knew him to be protected by divine infallibility? If it was possible for them to suspect him of dishonesty in this matter and this was contrary to the position of prophethood, it would not be proper to address him with such a verse. And yet we find no suggestion of this in any other verse of the Qur'an—not even those which invest him with absolute authority, proclaim that the spoils and booty of war belong to God and His Messenger, declare that the fifth (*khums*) is for the near relatives, or grant him unique permissions in the matter of his wives!

Moreover, God has addressed this suspicion and refuted it with the verse: *Or do they say: He has forged a lie against God? But if God pleased, He would seal your heart* (42:24). And we shall discuss this below.

But let us suppose that we interpret this verse in another way to avoid arousing such suspicions: What could possibly refute the countless traditions narrated from him by both sects stating it is a religious duty to love his Household?

The claim that this interpretation somehow contradicts the verse *You do not ask them any reward for it…* (12:104) is obviously false based on what we have already said. After all, it is no different in its connotation compared to this verse than that of the verse, *Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it, except that anyone who wishes should take the way to his Lord"* (25:57).

In *Kashshāf*, Zamakhsharī chooses this interpretation and then poses the question: Is it not said in Arabic: *illā mawaddat al-qurbā* or *illa al-mawaddah li al-qurbā*? So what is the meaning of *illā al-mawaddah fī al-qurbā*?

I respond: It means they are made the locus of affection and its abode. For example, one might say: "I have love for the family of so-and-so" (*lī fī āl fulān mawaddah*) or "I have affection for them and a strong love." By this, you mean that you love them and they are the locus and abode of your love.

He continues:

Using *fī* in connection with *mawaddah* is not the same as using *lām* with it when you say *illā al-mawaddah li al-qurbā*. This is because when

you say *fī* you actually introduce an implicit clause connected to the thing contained (*ẓarf bih*), as when you say: "The money is in the bag" (*al-māl fī al-kīs*). In other words, you say: "Except that love is fixed firmly in my near relatives."

…and whoever earns good, We give him more of good therein; surely God is Forgiving, Grateful: "To earn" (*iqtirfāf*) means to gain, and "good" (*ḥasanan*) means a deed which God is pleased with and rewards. A deed's good is determined by it being conducive to human felicity and the intention for which it is done. By the same token, a deed's evil is determined by the opposite. Increasing the good of a deed means to complete whatever aspects of it are deficient and perfect it, from which flows an increase in the reward granted in recompense for it. God says: …*and We will surely reward them by the best of what they used to do.* (29:7).

And He says: …*so that God may reward them by the best of what they have done, and enhance them out of His grace* (24:38).

So this verse means: Whoever earns a good deed, God will enhance the goodness of this deed by removing its shortcomings and increasing its reward. God is indeed Forgiving—because He erases iniquities—and Grateful—because He makes manifest the best aspects of a doer's deeds.

It is said: Good means love of the Prophet's near relatives, and this is supported by narrations from the Imams of the Prophet's Household regarding this verse. They say that this verse and the four that follow it were revealed about the love of the Prophet's near relatives. The logical corollary of this is that these verses should be Medinan, they should have a single flow of meaning, and the practical meaning of *good* (ḥasanan) is this love of the Prophet's Family. On this basis the words *Or do they say: He has forged a lie against God?* (24:42) and what follows them refers to what the hypocrites say because they find it hard to accept and those believers who give ear to them. And the words *And He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants…* until the end of the following verse refer to the repentance of those hypocrites who returned to faith and God's acceptance thereof.

God's words, …*surely God is Forgiving, Grateful*, contain a transition from speaking in the first-person ("We") to the third-person ("He"). This alludes to the reason He is attributed with forgiveness and gratitude. So this means: "God is Forgiving and Grateful *because* He is God."

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا ۖ فَإِنْ يَشَإِ اللَّهُ يَخْتِمْ عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ ۗ وَيَمْحُ

اللَّهُ الْبَاطِلَ وَيُحِقُّ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٢٤﴾

(42:24) ***Or do they say: He has forged a lie against God? But if God pleased, He would seal your heart; and God will blot out the falsehood and confirm the truth with His words; surely He knows best what is in the chests*** **(ṣudūr).**

The tone of this statement—whether to the end of the verse or taken by itself—is one of rebuke, implying a rejection of the accusation that he forged a lie against God.

But if God pleased, He would seal your heart… From the context, this means that you have not forged a lie against God because you have no say in the matter to begin with. So even if you wanted to, you cannot decide to forge something and pass it off as coming from God. This is nothing except revelation from God, which you have no role in producing; it depends entirely upon God's will. If He wished, He would seal your heart and close the door of revelation to you. But instead He has chosen to send revelation to you and make clear the truth, for it is ever His habit to erase falsehood and establish truth through His words.

When God says *But if God pleased, He would seal your heart*, this alludes to the fact that revelation in its entirety depends on God, and divests the Prophet of producing anything from his own self. This meaning—as you shall see—is the one most appropriate to the context here, assuming that the meaning of "near relatives" is those of the Prophet, and the rebuke is directed against the hypocrites with a sickness in their hearts.

However, commentators have mentioned other interpretations for this sentence:

One is mentioned by Zamakhsharī in his *Kashshāf*. He says:

> *But if God pleased, He would seal your heart* means that if God willed He would make you someone whose heart was sealed—someone just like your accusers—for you to invent lies about God. After all, no one invents such lies except people like them!

And this approach invokes scepticism that someone like the Prophet would invent lies as from one angle this is equivalent to associating partners with Him and becoming one of those with a sealed heart. This is like a trustworthy person who has let someone down saying: "Perhaps God has forsaken me or blinded my heart!" Of course he does not mean to

say God has done either of these things, he merely means to express his disbelief that someone like him could have done this, and to call attention to the fact that he has committed a grave sin.

It is also said:

> This means that if you had so much as considered inventing a lie against God, He would have sealed your heart and caused you to forget the Qur'an, so how could you possibly do such a thing? And this is God's saying: *If you ascribe a partner to God, your works shall fail* (39:65).

And it is said:

> It means that if God wills, He could fix your heart upon patience (*ṣabr*) should they bother you so that you will not be grieved by their accusations: "He is a liar and a magician!" And these interpretations are not without their weaknesses.

And it is said:

> It means that if God willed, He would seal your heart just as He has sealed theirs. This is a consolation to the Prophet so that he will give thanks to his Lord for all the blessings He has given him.

And it is said:

> It means that if God willed, He would seal the hearts of the faithless and their tongues and hasten their punishment. The reason why God uses the second-person singular instead of a third-person plural is because He means to say: "He could seal your heart, O you who say that the Prophet has forged a lie against God!"

…and God blots out the falsehood and confirms the truth with His words… Here the present tense (*muḍāriʿ*) is used—in *blots out* and *confirms*—to signify a continuous action. This means that God's continuous habit is to erase falsehood and confirm the truth with His words. *His words* refers to the divine revelation He sends down to the prophets, lordly speech (*taklīm rubūbī*), and it could also mean the souls of the prophets insofar as they are inspired by an unseen faculty (*ḍamīr ghaybī*).

…surely He knows best what is in the chests: This serves to explain … *and God blots out*…. In other words, He erases falsehood and establishes truth with His words because He knows the hearts and their contents; He knows what revelation and preaching will lead them towards guidance or error and what will open them or seal them.

It is said that this verse implies a promise of divine assistance (*naṣr*) to the Prophet, and this interpretation is not without merit.

وَهُوَ الَّذِی یَقْبَلُ التَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِ وَیَعْفُو عَنِ السَّیِّئَاتِ وَیَعْلَمُ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(42:25) ***And He it is Who accepts repentance from [of]*** **(ʿan)** ***His servants and pardons the evil deeds and He knows what you do.***

In Arabic, it is possible to say "accepts… from…" by using either the particle *min* or *ʿan*. In *Kashshāf*, Zamakhsharī says:

> One can say: *qabiltu minhu al-shayʾ* or *qabiltū ʿanhu al-shayʾ*. In the first instance, this means "I took it from him and made him the source and origin of my acceptance." However, the second instance (which appears in the verse) means "I took it from him and made it my own [it signifies complete separation between the giver and what has been given]."

The words …*and He knows what you do* urge people to repent and warn them against sinning. Their meaning is clear.

وَیَسْتَجِیبُ الَّذِینَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَیَزِیدُهُمْ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۚ وَالْكَافِرُونَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِیدٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

(42:26) ***And He answers those who believe and do good deeds, and gives them more out of His grace; and [as for] the faithless, they shall have a severe punishment.***

The subject of the verb *He answers* (yastajīb) is God.

The phrase *those who believe and do good deeds* is situated as the verb's object, meaning He responds to them. It is said that the subject of the verb *answers* is actually *those who believe*, but this is very unlikely in the context.

"Answering" (*istijābah*) means responding to a supplication. Insofar as all worship is a kind of supplication to Him, he refers to accepting worship as answering or responding to them. The evidence for this meaning is God's words, *and gives them more out of His grace*, for the apparent meaning here is an increase in their reward. The same is true when He juxtaposes *and [as for] the faithless, they shall have a severe punishment*, with the condition of the faithful.[1]

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1 In other words, this shows that He is talking about the situation of the believers

It is said: This means that He responds to them when they supplicate and not only gives them what they ask for but more as well. But this does not fit with the context of the verse, as God does not only respond to the supplications of the faithful.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, Zādān narrates from ᶜAlī:
There is a verse concerning us in the house of *ḥā mīm*[1] saying that none preserves our love except every believer.
Then he recited:
Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives."
Ṭabrisī says:
It is to this that Kumayt refers with the words: "We found a verse of yours in the house of *ḥā mīm* / on which ponder those of us both wary and forthright."[2]

(2) Concerning this, in an authentic narration from al-Ḥasan b. ᶜAlī:
He gave a speech to the people, in which he said: "We are the Prophet's Household whose love God has enjoined upon each and every Muslim by saying: *Say, 'I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives.'*"

(3) In *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narrators from ᶜAbd Allāh b. ᶜAjalān, it is related that Abū Jaᶜfar [Imām al-Bāqir] said about *Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives"*:
They are the Imāms.

Author's comments: The traditions the Shiᶜa narrate from the Imams of the Prophet's Household in this regard are copious in number.

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad, ᶜAbd Allāh b. Ḥamīd, Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr, and Ibn Mardawayh all relate via Ṭāwūs:
Ibn ᶜAbbās was asked about the verse …*except love of my near*

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in the Hereafter because He compares it to the position of the faithless in the Hereafter. [Trans.]

1 Referring to this chapter of the Qur'an, as it begins with these letters. [Trans.]

2 By "wary" and "forthright", Kumayt means that amongst the supporters of the Prophet's Household are those who do not openly say that the verse refers to them because they are wary of persecution by their enemies, but there are others who proclaim it openly and will not keep silent. [Trans.]

relatives….

Saʿīd b. Jubayr said: "They are the near relatives of Muḥammad's Household."

Ibn ʿAbbās interjected: "Not so fast! The Prophet was not amongst the Quraysh save for the fact they were related to one another. So the verse means: '…except that you respect the relation that exists between us.'"

Author's comments: This has been narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās by other chains as well. However, we have seen that this meaning does not fit with the verse or its context. It is strange indeed to see that some of these narrations try to claim that the verse under discussion has been abrogated by God's saying: *Say, "Whatever reward I may have asked you is for your own good. My reward lies only with God, and He is witness to all things"* (34:47).

(5) Abu Naʿīm and al-Daylamī narrate from Mujāhid, from Ibn ʿAbbās that the Prophet said:

I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives, that you preserve me in my Household and love them for me.

(6) Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ṭabarānī, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate with a weak chain from Saʿīd b. Jubayr that Ibn ʿAbbās said:

When the verse came down *Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives"* people said: "O Messenger of God! Who are these near relatives of yours whose love is a duty?" He replied: "ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, and her two sons."

Author's comments: Ṭabrisī narrates the same tradition in *Majmaʿ* but with "her sons" (*wuluduhā*) instead of "her two sons" (*waladāhā*).

(7) Ibn Jarīr narrates from Abū al-Daylam:

When ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn was brought to Damascus as a prisoner and stood on its steps, a Syrian man stood up and said: "Praise God for destroying you utterly!"

So ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn asked him: "Have you read the Qur'an?"

The man said: "Yes."

He asked: "Have you read the stanza of *Ḥā Mīm*?"

The man said: "Yes."

He asked: "Have you read the verse: *Say, I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives?*"

The man asked: "Are you them!?"

He said: "Yes."

Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrates from Ibn ʿAbbas: "*…and whoever earns good…*" means the love of Muḥammad's Household."

Author's comments: A tradition to the same effect has been narrated in *al-Kāfī* from Muḥammad b. Muslim from Abū Jaʿfar.

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we read:

Ibn Abī Najrān related to me from ʿĀṣim b. Ḥamīd from Muḥammad b. Muslim: "I heard Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] say about *Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives*: 'This means of his Household (*ahl al-bayt*).'"

"He continued: 'The *Anṣār* came to God's Messenger and said: "We have given you our shelter and support already, so take some of our wealth to help you in your adversity." Then the verse was revealed: *Say, "I do not ask you any reward for it except love of my near relatives*" meaning of his Household.'

"Then he said: 'Do you not see that if a man has a friend and this friend has something against his household, his heart will not be at rest? God did not want His Messenger to feel any aversion to his community, so he enjoined upon them the love of the near relatives. That way, if they obeyed, they obeyed an obligation, and if they disobeyed, they disobeyed an obligation.'

"He said: 'Then they dispersed from him, some of them saying: "We offered him our wealth but he said: 'No, defend my Household after me instead.'" While others said: "God's Messenger said no such thing, and they refused." This is just as God related from them: *Or do they say: He has forged a lie against God?* So God said in response: *But if God pleased, He would seal your heart*—meaning: if you had forged something. *And God will blot out the falsehood…*—meaning He will invalidate it *and confirm the truth with His words*—meaning with the Imams and the *Qāʾim* from the Household of Muḥammad—*surely He knows best what is in the breasts.*'"

Author's comments: Suyūṭī relates the story of the Anṣār in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh via Ibn Jubayr, but he says it is weak.

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Verses 27-50

The beginning of these verses is connected to the discussion of sustenance (*rizq*) mentioned in the verse *God is graceful to His servants; He gives sustenance to whom He pleases* (42:19), above. This was touched on in God's saying *His are the keys of the heavens and the earth; He expands and constrains the means of sustenance for whom He pleases…* (42:12). We have also seen that the blessing of the true religion is also a kind of sustenance that God gives to His believing servants. It is with this in mind that the discussion of divine sustenance enters the discourse on revelation which the verses of this *sūrah* are intended to expound, and repeatedly surfaces in the course thereof.

Next, these verses mention some of the signs of Divine Unity that are connected to sustenance, such as the creation of the heavens and the earth, the propagation of animals therein, the ships that sail upon the seas and God's giving male and female children to whomsoever he chooses, and making whomsoever he chooses barren.

Then they mention that God gives people some sustenance in this world, but it is a fleeting enjoyment that will vanish with this life. However there is sustenance for the faithful in the Hereafter and that this is better and more lasting. From here the discourse shifts to discuss the traits of the faithful and their pleasant destiny, before turning to what awaits the wrongdoers; the terrors of the Resurrection and the punishment of the Hereafter are their fate.

وَلَوْ بَسَطَ اللَّهُ الرِّزْقَ لِعِبَادِهِ لَبَغَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَٰكِنْ يُنَزِّلُ بِقَدَرٍ مَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّهُ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٧﴾

(42:27) ***And if God should expand the provision for His servants they would certainly revolt in the earth; but He sends it down according to a measure as He pleases; surely of His servants He is all-aware, all-seeing.***

"Constrain" (*yaqdir*) is opposed to "expand" (*yabsuṭ*) with the meaning of "narrowing," as we saw in the previous verse: *He expands and constrains*

the means of subsistence for whom He pleases (42:16). *Qadr* or *qadar* both mean the quantity (*kamiyyah*) of a thing and its dimensions, hence God's saying: "*but He sends it down according to a measure*" (42:27). They can also mean to make something of a specific quantity, as when God says: *Then We measured; so how excellent measurers are We!* (77:23).

"Revolt" (*baghī*) means "wrongdoing" (*ẓulm*). The phrase *of His servants* could have easily been replaced with the pronoun construct "of them", but God chooses to use the word servants again to show that He is all-aware and all-seeing of them *because* they are His servants, created by Him and sustained by Him—so how could they be hidden or unknown to Him? The same applies to *for His servants* immediately when discussing providing of sustenance above; it alludes to the fact that they are His servants and a servant's provision is the duty of his master.

With this in mind, the verse means: If God expanded the sustenance of His servants so that all of them were satiated, they would commit wrongdoing upon the earth. This is because people with abundant wealth usually have insolent, arrogant, and rebellious temperaments, just as God says: *Indeed man becomes rebellious when he considers himself needless* (96:6–7). So instead, God sends down sustenance as He pleases in a specific measure and quantity because He is all-knowing and all-seeing of His servants. He knows what each one of them deserves and what is best for each one of them—whether wealth or poverty—and He gives that to each of them.

God's words …*but He sends it down according to a measure as He pleases*… explain that the divine custom (*sunnah ilāhiyyah*) in giving sustenance is to bestow it according to what is best for the people. In other words, their best interests determine their sustenance. This does not conflict with the rebelliousness we see in some wealthy people or the fact that their sustenance feeds into this, for there is another divine custom that governs this one, and that is the divine custom of trial and tribulation (*al-ibtilāʾ wa al-imtiḥān*); God says: *Rather your possessions and children are a trial.* (64:15). Moreover there is a third divine custom, namely that of beguiling the faithless and luring them into destruction (*al-makr wa al-istidrāj*); God says: *As for those who deny Our signs, We will draw them imperceptibly [into ruin], whence they do not know. And I will grant them respite, for My devising is indeed sure* (7:182–183).

In short, the divine custom of apportioning sustenance according to a person's best interests is God's default mode of behavior, unless God is

testing them …*so that God may test what is in your breasts*… (3:154). Or, unless they turn God's blessing into a burden by being ungrateful for it, whereat God's habit becomes that of giving them what will lead them toward rebellion. *Indeed God does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls* (13:11).

Just as giving someone wealth, children and other forms of blessings are a person's share of provision, there are other forms of sustenance as well. True knowledge and divine teachings which have been received from revelation are sustenance too; this is because being tested by them and putting them into practice is also a kind of sustenance.

So if all the divine teachings and laws from beginning to end came down in a single go—bearing in mind that these would encompass all aspects of human existence—this would have been too difficult for people to bear and all but a few would have refused to believe. So instead, God sent down His revelation gradually to the Prophet with periods of respite and thereby prepared people to accept it piece by piece. God says: *We have sent the Qur'an in parts so that you may read it to the people a little at a time, and We have sent it down piecemeal* (17:106).

The same replies to the higher teachings (*maʿārif ʿāliyah*) which are hidden in the depths of the basic teachings of religion; were they not veiled from the masses but visible to them like religion's manifest teachings, only a few would be able to understand them. So instead God speaks to them in a way that each person benefits according to his own measure of understanding and the openness of his heart. God explains this in a similitude: *He sends down water from the sky whereat the valleys are flooded to their capacity* (13:17).

So too to the laws and moral duties of the religion; if everyone were laden with all of them, they would have found it too difficult to follow them all, so instead God apportioned these laws in proportion to the moral trials for which people require them.

Sustenance in the form of laws and teachings, from whichever angle you look at it, is exactly like the physical sustenance that is divided amongst people according to what is best for them.

وَهُوَ الَّذِى يُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا قَنَطُوا وَيَنْشُرُ رَحْمَتَهُ ۚ وَهُوَ الْوَلِىُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٨﴾

(42:28) ***And He it is Who sends down rain*** **(ghayth)** ***after they have***

despaired, and He unfolds His mercy; and He is the Guardian, the Praised One.

"Despair" (*qunūṭ*) means to have relinquished hope, and *ghayth* ("rain") means *maṭr*.

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Ṭabrisī says: "*Ghayth* is rain at a fortuitous time, while *maṭr* is a general downpour. It could be useful or it could be harmful, whether by its coming or by its absence."

"Unfolding mercy" means to divide blessings between people by causing plants to grow and bringing forth fruits, both of which are caused by the rain.

In this verse the subject of the discourse shifts from sustenance to the signs of Divine Unity which are connected to people's sustenance, and other verses with the same import follow it. This verse closes with two of the Divine Names: "The Guardian" (*al-Walī*) and "The Praised One" (*al-Ḥamīd*). These are two of God's Beautiful Names which are used to praise Him for His magnificent actions.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَثَّ فِيهِمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ جَمْعِهِمْ إِذَا يَشَاءُ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

(42:29) ***And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and what He has spread forth in both of them of beasts; and when He pleases, He is well-able to gather them together.***

"To spread" (*baththh*) means to scatter. In Arabic, it is said that the wind spreads the dust when it stirs it up. A "beast" (*dābah*) is that which crawls (*yadubb*) upon the earth, thus including all kinds of animal. The meaning of this is clear.

The apparent meaning of this verse also suggests that the heavens contain creatures like the beasts of the earth. Some suggest that these creatures in the heavens are the angels, but this is rejected on the grounds that the word "beast" is not used to refer to angels.

…and when He pleases He is well-able to gather them together… This alludes to the resurrection of whatever beasts have been spread within them. He uses the word "gather" (*jamʿ*) because this is the opposite of "spread" (*baththh*). When He says "gather them", the fact He uses the masculine-plural pronoun ("*hum*"), usually reserved for beings with intellects, that the creatures in the heavens have intellects like the human

being. After all, God says: *There is no animal on land, nor a bird that flies with its wings, but they are communities like yourselves* (6:38).

"Well-able" (*qadīr*) refers to one of God's Beautiful Names in which Divine Power is gathered and focused. Rāghib says:

> When a person is described as *qadīr*, this means he has the ability to do something, but when God is described as *qadīr*, this means to negate all inability (*ʿajz*) from Him. It is impossible to describe anyone besides God with absolute power, even when using word. In fact, it is proper to say: "He is able to do such-and-such" (*qādir ʿalā kadhā*). And when we call someone *qādir* this is in an implicitly qualified sense. For this reason, no one except God is attributed power (*qudrah*) from one aspect save that it is also proper to attribute him impotence (*ʿajz*) from another. It is only God from whom all impotence is divested from every angle. *Qadīr* means someone who can do whatever he wills to the extent that wisdom decrees—no more and no less. For this reason, it is only proper to describe God as being *qadīr* and to say "He has power to do whatever He wishes."
>
> *Muqtadir* has a similar meaning, as when God says …*an omnipotent King* (54:55). However, *muqtadir* can also apply to people. When it is used for God, it has the same meaning as *qadīr*, but when it is used for people, it means someone who has either acquired or been endowed with some power.

Rāghib's analysis is sound except for when He says that when we attribute power (*qudrah*) to God this means to negate any impotence from Him. Here he has been rather brazen, as God's Essence Attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyyah*), like life, knowledge, and power have affirmative meanings,[1] and they are identical with the Divine Essence. They are not merely negations, such that saying God is alive, knowing, and powerful simply means He is *not* dead, ignorant, or impotent, which is the doctrine of the Sabeans. This is because the logical outcome of such a doctrine is that the Divine Essence does not have Perfective Attributes (*ṣifāt al-kamāl*).

The truth is that the meaning of God's power is that He can do whatever He wishes; it only as the logical corollary of this that all impotency is negated from Him.

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1 That is, they do not merely negate their opposites from God, but mean something in their own right. [Trans.]

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

(42:30) ***And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and [yet] He pardons many [of your faults].***

And affliction (*muṣībah*) refers to a calamity that afflicts someone, as if it has been aimed at him.[1] "What your hands have wrought" means your sins and misdeeds.

When God says *and He pardons much*, this means much of the misdeeds your hands have wrought.

The address of this verse is communal; it is directed towards society as a whole, rather than broken up into particularities. So when God speaks about afflictions, this must refer to afflictions that affect the society as a whole, such as drought, high prices, epidemic diseases, earthquakes, and the like thereof.

So this verse means: afflictions and calamities that affect your society and which you are afflicted with as a result are because of your sins, and God forgives many of them without punishing you.

Hence this verse is in the same vein as:

Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of the doings of the people's hands, that He may make them taste something of what they have done, so that they may come back. (30:41)

If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth. But they denied (7:96)

Indeed God does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls. (13:11)

And other verses such as these saying that there is a special link between human activity and the natural order, such that if human society follows the call of human nature in its belief and actions, all manner of bounties and good things will be opened up to them, while if human society spreads corruption, it will suffer ruin.

This is what will happen as a result of this divine custom, unless the custom of trial or that of luring the faithless to destruction comes into

1 This is because *muṣībah* comes from *iṣābah*, which means to strike (as with an arrow). [Trans.]

play, in which case things will go differently. God says: *Then We gave them good in the place of evil until they became many and said: Distress and happiness did indeed befall our fathers. Then We took them by surprise while they were unaware* (7:95).

However, the address in the verse could also be read as being general, but applying to people's individual lives. In other words, whatever afflictions a person may suffer in themselves, their property, their families or whatever is connected to them, it goes back to a sin or misdeed they committed, and God forgives many of these.

In any case, the address in the verse is to all people, believers and disbelievers alike. The tone of the verse supports this reading, as does the verse that follows it. This is first of all.

Secondly, when God says *your hands have wrought*, He is only referring to sins and misdeeds, not human actions in general.

Thirdly, the afflictions that befall people are merely the effects of their actions in this world, as there is a connection between them and the actions, so they fall under the chain of cause-and-effect rather than divine recompense for these actions.

What we mentioned above answers the following objection raised against this verse being general: afflictions befell the Prophets while they are infallible and did not sin, and also afflictions befall children and the legally insane, neither of whom are under any moral obligation, so they cannot have committed any sin to warrant such afflictions. Therefore we must limit the verse in light of the afflictions suffered by the Prophets and the afflictions suffered by those not held morally responsible for their actions.

What we have mentioned answers this because the affirmation of a sin having been committed in the phrase …*what your hands have wrought* … indicates that this verse is only addressed to those who are capable of committing sins. This verse, at its very outset, does not apply to infallibles or to those not morally responsible for their actions. So they are not included in the address of the verse as a matter of specificity (*takhaṣṣus*) rather than needing to be specified (*takhṣīṣ*).

Second, it answers the interpretation that the verse entails all the sins of the faithful being forgiven for they either suffer the recompense for their sins in this world or they are forgiven for them.

This is answered by the fact that the verse's context is explaining the connection between afflictions and sins, and the fact that some sins have

ill-effects in this world that affect people while others are forgiven and so do not afflict them because of external factors that prevent them from doing so, such as maintaining ties of family, voluntary alms-giving, the supplication of a fellow believer, repentance, and other such things that have been described in the traditions. As for the recompense (*jazāʾ*) of these deeds in the Hereafter, the verse does not address these, as we said.

And because the verse is addressed to both believers and disbelievers, as was mentioned above, it makes no sense to be selective about what it means by saying that it shows the believers will be forgiven all their sins but not the disbelievers.

With all this in mind, the first interpretation (that it addresses society as a whole rather than individuals) is more fitting.

وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿٣١﴾

(42:31) ***And you cannot escape in the earth, and you shall not have a guardian or a helper besides God.***

In the context of the above verses, the meaning of this verse is clear. It says that you cannot thwart God to escape the afflictions brought on by your sins. You have no one besides Him to look after your affairs and avert these afflictions from you, nor any helper to support you in repelling them.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ الْجَوَارِ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ ﴿٣٢﴾

(42:32) ***And among His signs are the ships in the sea like mountains.***

The Arabic word used for "ships" here is *jawārī*, which is the plural of *jāriyah* (lit. "that which sails").

The word used for mountains is *aʿlām*, the plural of *ʿalam* (lit. "landmark"). Ships are compared to mountains because of their vastness and height. The rest is clear.

إِنْ يَشَأْ يُسْكِنِ الرِّيحَ فَيَظْلَلْنَ رَوَاكِدَ عَلَىٰ ظَهْرِهِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

(42:33) ***If He pleases, He causes the wind to become still so that they lie motionless on its back; most surely there are signs in this***

for every patient, grateful one,

"He" in *if He pleases* refers to God. "To remain" (*ẓalla*) means "to become." "Motionless" (*rākidah*, pl. *rawākid*) means something that stays fixed in place. The verse means that if God wills, He will still the wind that propels the ships so that they become stuck in place on the surface of the ocean.

…most surely there are signs in this for every patient, grateful one: The original meaning of "patience" (*ṣabr*) is restraint, and the original meaning of "gratitude" (*shukr*) is to display the blessing of the one who bestowed it through word or deed. The verse means that in everything mentioned about ships—how they sail upon the surface of the ocean because of the winds and carry people and provisions from one shore to another—there are signs for a person who restrains himself from being preoccupied with things that do not concern him and instead occupies himself with pondering on God's blessings. And pondering on a blessing is a kind of gratitude.

It is said that *every patient, grateful one* means the believer (*muʾmin*). This is because the believer is either in hardship or ease, so he is patient in hardship and grateful in ease.

أَوْ يُوبِقْهُنَّ بِمَا كَسَبُوا وَيَعْفُ عَنْ كَثِيرٍ ﴿٣٤﴾

(42:34) ***Or He may make them founder for what they have earned, and [even then] pardon most.***

"To founder" (*ībāq*) means to bring to ruin. The feminine plural pronoun (*hunna*) is its object, referring to the ships, while the masculine plural pronoun (*hum*) is used to refer to people. Both *Or He may make them founder…* and *and pardon…* are in conjunction with *…He causes the wind to become still…* (in the previous verse).

This verse means that if God wills, He will bring the ships to ruin by drowning them on account of people's misdeeds, even though He forgives many of them. In other words, just some of people's misdeeds are enough to bring these ships to ruin, even if God forgives most of them.

It is said: By bringing them to ruin, God means destroying their passengers, whether figuratively (*majāz*) or through an implicit construct

state (*taqdīr*).[1] And because *make them founder* is in conjunction with *still the wind*, it means by sending a powerful gale to capsize them. In other words: "And if He wills, He will send winds to drown them, but many will be saved by His forgiveness." This would make the complete meaning: "If He wills, He will still the wind… and if He wills, He will send it to capsize the boats and drown some people on account of their sins, and save others of them through His forgiveness." However, as you can see this interpretation is somewhat torturous.

It is also said: *and pardon…* is conjoined with *…still the wind... because of what they have earned*. This is why it is joined with "and" (*wa*) rather than "or" (*aw*). This makes the meaning: "If He wills, He will punish them by either stilling the winds or making them ferocious, but if He wills He will forgive much." However, like the previous interpretation, this too is a rather torturous reading.

وَيَعْلَمَ الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ مَحِيصٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

(42:35) *And [that] those who dispute about Our signs may know; there is no place of refuge for them.*

It is said: This goal (*ghāyah*) for what has been mentioned above is joined to another that is implicit. Its meaning is like saying: "To demonstrate His power and so that those who dispute about Our signs may know that there is no escape for them and no refuge." This is a common phenomenon in the Qur'an, but when this happens the conjoined clause is prefixed with the *lām* of purpose (*lām al-ghāya*), as in God's saying: *so that God may ascertain those who have faith* (3:140). And in His saying: *that he might be of those who possess certitude* (6:75).

Some commentators allow it to be conjoined with the consequent of an implicit conditional sentence (*jazāʾ al-sharṭ*) beginning with "If…", with the sense of: "If you come to me, I will respect you and give you such-and-such." In this case, "Give you…" will be in the accusative case (*naṣb*).[2] This is a controversial issue of Arabic grammar, so let the reader refer to what the grammarians have said.

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1 In both of these cases: the speaker refers to ships but means the people aboard them, just as one might refer to a town but mean its inhabitants. [Trans.]

2 Just as *know* (yaʿlama) is in the accusative case in the present verse. [Trans.]

فَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَمَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(42:36) ***So whatever thing you are given, that is only a provision of this world's life, and what is with God is better and more lasting for those who believe and rely on their Lord.***

This is explaining what has already been mentioned about sustenance (*rizq*) and how it is divided between the sustenance people have in this world, which includes both believers and disbelievers, and the sustenance of the Hereafter that lies with God and is only for the faithful. And from here the discussion moves to describe the qualities of the faithful and mention some of what awaits the wrongdoers on the Day of Resurrection.

Based on the context, the phrase *So whatever thing you are given, that is only a provision of this world's life* is addressed to humanity in general rather than just the idolaters. When it says *whatever thing you are given*, this means everything He gives people and whatever blessings He provides for them. Putting *provision* into a possessive construct with *this world's life* alludes to the fact that these provisions are transient, ephemeral, and will one day run out. So the verse is saying "everything you have been given is just a provision that you will enjoy for a few short days."

…and what is with God is better and more lasting for those who believe and rely on their Lord: *What is with God* means the reward God has stored up for the faithful. *For* in *for those who believe* indicates ownership (*mulk*);[1] reading it is as adverbial (*ẓarf*) is ungrammatical. It is said that *for* is connected to *better and more lasting*,[2] but the first makes more sense. In any case, what is with God is better because it is free from pain and hardship, and it is more lasting because it never ends.

وَالَّذِينَ يَجْتَنِبُونَ كَبَائِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشَ وَإِذَا مَا غَضِبُوا هُمْ يَغْفِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(42:37) ***And those who shun the great sins and indecencies, and whenever they are angry they forgive.***

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1 Meaning "What is with God for those who believe is better and more lasting." [Trans.]

2 Meaning it is "better and more lasting *for* those who believe." [Trans.]

This is conjoined with the phrase *for those who believe…* in the previous verse because this verse and the two verses that follow it enumerate the good qualities of the faithful. Some commentators have claimed that this represents a new discussion, but the context does not support this.

Great sins are major transgressions which carry terrible repercussions. Amongst them God counts wine and gambling, about which He says: *Say, "There is a great sin in both of them"* (2:219): indecencies (*fawāḥish*, pl. *fāḥishah*) which are abominable sins, including fornication and sodomy. God says: *Do not approach fornication. It is indeed an indecency and an evil way* (17:32); and He quotes the Prophet Lot saying to his people: *"What! Do you commit this indecency while you see?"* (16:54).

When God says *and those who shun the great sins and indecencies*, bearing in mind that this *sūrah* was revealed in Mecca, this refers to something general which will be elaborated on when He reveals His prohibitions on major sins and indecencies.

…And whenever they are angry they forgive refers to forgiveness while angry, and this is one of the most unique traits of the faithful, which is why He chooses such a particular way of expressing it. He does not say "they forgive when they become angry" because the way the Qur'an phrases it emphasizes this meaning from several angles; it signifies that there is no shortage in their forgiveness even when they are angry.

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(42:38) ***And those who respond to their Lord and maintain the prayer, and their rule is to take counsel among themselves, and who spend out of what We have given them.***

"To respond" (*istijāba*) means to answer, and "responding to their Lord" means that they answer Him in the righteous conduct He has charged them with—based on the context of the verse—and prayer is singled out for mention amongst these deeds out of respect for its special sanctity.

Based on the fact that these verses appear to be Meccan, meaning that the obligations of things like *zakāt*, *khums*, fasting or *jihād* had not yet been promulgated, we see again that the phrase *and those who respond to their Lord* refers to righteous conduct in general, just as *those who shun*

the great sins refers to sins in general. The same can also be said of the verses that follow.

…and their rule is to take counsel among themselves, and who spend out of what We have given them: Al-Rāghib says:

> "To take counsel" (*tashāwur, mashāwarah, mashwarah*) means to bring out an opinion by referring to one another. The root *sh-w-r* literally means to bring honey out of its place. God says: *Consult them in the affairs* (3:159). A *shūrā* is the matter for which counsel is being sought. God says: "*their rule is to take counsel among themselves.*"

So "counsel" means a matter they resolve to discuss amongst themselves. Some commentators suggest this is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*).

With this in mind, the verse means: "It is their habit to take counsel amongst themselves."

In any case, this verse alludes to the fact that they are sensible people who apprehend reality and exert considerable effort to identify the proper opinion by referring to other intellects. So this verse is very close in its meaning to the verse: *Those who listen to the word, then follow the best of it* (39:18).

…and who spend out of what We have given them shows that they spend their wealth seeking God's pleasure.

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَهُمُ الْبَغْيُ هُمْ يَنْتَصِرُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(42:39) *And those who, when great wrong afflicts them, defend themselves* (yantaṣirūn).

Rāghib says: "*Intiṣār* and *istinṣār* mean to seek help (*nuṣrah*)."

So this verse means that the faithful are those who, when they are wronged, seek help from others. And since they are all united upon the truth they are like a single mind, if one of them is wronged, it is as if all of them are wronged, and they seek to resist this injustice and give help against it.

Others say that *intiṣār* means to help one another, as with the verb *ikhtaṣama* and *takhāṣama* (both of which mean to quarrel), or *istabaqa* and *tasabaqa* (both of which mean to compete). If this is the case, its meaning is clear.

In any case, this verse is speaking about their resistance to oppression. This does not contradict their quality of forgiving when angry, as

resisting oppression and closing the door of society on those able to carry it out, and defending oneself and defending others for this purpose is a humanitarian obligation. God says: *…if they ask your help for the sake of religion, it is incumbent on you to help them …* (8:72). And: *…fight the one which aggresses until it returns to God's ordinance* (49:9).

وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِثْلُهَا ۖ فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(42:40) ***And the recompense of an injury is an injury like it, but whoever forgives and amends, he shall have his reward from God; surely He does not love the unjust.***

This explains how a person should act in self-defence or the defence of others, namely that they should confront the aggressor with actions like his own and that this is not unjust or aggression.

It is said: The second is called *sayyiʾah* ("evil") to show it is done in response to the first, just as when God says: *So should anyone aggress against you, assail him in the manner he assailed you*. (2:194) Zamakhsharī says:

> Both refer to a manner of action. The initial act and its retaliation are both called "an injury" (*sayyiʾah*) because they harm the one to whom they are done. So this verse heeds the true meaning of the word and thereby alludes to the fact that it is only proper to return an injury so long as the response is proportional and not excessive.

…but whoever forgives and amends, he shall have his reward from God: This is a wonderful promise from God for those who forgive and make amends. The apparent meaning of "make amends" (*iṣlāḥ*) is to make amends in what is between him and his Lord. But it is also said that this refers to making amends between himself and the one who wronged him through forgiveness and leniency.

…surely He does not love the unjust. It is said: This explains that God does not ask the wronged party to forgive the wrongdoer because God supports the wrongdoer or because He loves him, but rather to offer the wronged party a great reward thereby. And this is because God loves kindness and magnanimity.

It is also said: This means God does not love the one who is unjust in

retribution or other situations by exceeding the proper bounds of what he can do.

While both these interpretations are sound in of themselves, the context of the verse does not support them, especially because the phrase *but whoever forgives and amends, he shall have his reward from God* interposes between the explanation and its occasion.

The phrase …*surely He does not love the unjust* could also be to explain the reason for which the recompense of an injury is another injury, without looking at whether this recompense is equal or proportional.

وَلَمَنِ انْتَصَرَ بَعْدَ ظُلْمِهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ ﴿٤١﴾ إِنَّمَا السَّبِيلُ
عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَظْلِمُونَ النَّاسَ وَيَبْغُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ
عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٢﴾ وَلَمَنْ صَبَرَ وَغَفَرَ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٤٣﴾

(42:41-43) ***And whoever defends himself after his oppression, these it is against whom there is no way [to blame]. The way [to blame] is only against those who oppress men and revolt in the earth unjustly; these shall have a painful punishment. And whoever is patient and forgiving, these most surely are actions due to courage*** **(ʿazm al-umūr).**

"His" in *his oppression* refers to the wronged party, and it is called his oppression because this is a construct state (*iḍāfah*) in which a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) has been added to its object (*mafʿūl*).

These three verses explain and remove the ambiguity around the previous verse, *but whoever forgives and amends, he shall have his reward from God*. This is because, upon reading the previous verse, the oppressed might wrongly imagine that this means they have no right to defend themselves. So God explains first of all: *And whoever defends himself after his oppression, these it is against whom there is no way*—there is no way to blame them, nor is it allowed to deprive them of their right [for redress] in the Divine Law. Here, a singular pronoun (*his*) is used first because *whoever* is grammatically singular and a plural (*these*) is then used because it is plural in meaning.

Secondly, God explains: *The way [to blame] is only against those who oppress men and revolt in the earth unjustly* (42:42)—the way in its entirety is open for the oppressed to avenge themselves against their oppressors,

and God further affirms this with the coda: *these shall have a painful punishment*.

Thirdly, God explains: *And whoever is patient and forgiving, these most surely are actions due to courage* (42:43). This shows that His call for patience and forgiveness does not deprive the right of the oppressed to defend themselves; it is merely to guide them to one of the greatest virtues attainable, for it takes great courage to be forgiving and patient. God has placed great emphasis on this by prefixing the *lām* of oath (*lām al-qasam*) to the predicate, which is itself the predicate of "surely" (*inna*), to show His great concern for the meaning of this verse.

وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ ۗ وَتَرَى الظَّالِمِينَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا
الْعَذَابَ يَقُولُونَ هَلْ إِلَىٰ مَرَدٍّ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

(42:44) *And whomsoever God makes err* (yuḍlil), *he has no guardian after Him; and you shall see the unjust, when they see the punishment, saying: Is there any way to return?*

Having described the qualities of the faithful, promising them their sustenance which He has set aside for them and foretelling the felicitous destiny to which God has guided them, God now turns to their opposites; the wrongdoers who have no hope of receiving this guidance that will lead them to felicity and who are denied the noble sustenance of the Hereafter. God explains that He has led them astray because of their faithlessness and denial, so that they will not reach the sustenance that is with Him, nor will He gladden them thereby. He says that they have no guardian to protect them besides Him or to give them the sustenance He has withheld from them. The color will drain from their faces when they behold the punishment and they will wish that they could return to this world to act righteously so that they could be like the faithful.

So when God says *and whomsoever God makes err…*, this is placing the cause—which is God causing them to err and the absence of any other guardian to protect them, guide them or provide for them—in the place of the effect, which is guidance and sustenance.

And when He says *…and you shall see the unjust, when they see the punishment, saying: Is there any way to return?* This alludes to their desire to return to this world having seen the punishment and despaired of a pleasant fate.

You shall see… is addressed to everyone but directed to the Prophet insofar as he can see. So this means: "You shall see, and everyone who can see will see…." This also alludes to the fact that the unjust shall desire to return to this world in the presence of witnesses.

وَتَرَاهُمْ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا خَاشِعِينَ مِنَ الذُّلِّ يَنْظُرُونَ مِنْ طَرْفٍ خَفِيٍّ ۗ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ الْخَاسِرِينَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَهْلِيهِمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ فِي عَذَابٍ مُقِيمٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

(42:45) ***And you shall see them brought before it, humbling themselves because of the abasement, looking with a faint glance. And those who believe shall say: Surely the losers are they who have lost themselves and their followers on the resurrection day. Now surely the iniquitous shall remain in lasting chastisement.***

"It" in *before it* refers to Hellfire based on the context. *A faint glance* means a weak glance. A person only looks with a faint glance when facing something horrific; they do not want to avert their gaze and lose sight of it, but they do not have the courage to fill their vision with it, as when a condemned prisoner looks at the executioner's blade. The rest is clear.

And those who believe shall say: Surely the losers are they who have lost themselves and their followers on the resurrection day: By this they mean that those who have truly lost everything are those who have lost themselves because they are denied salvation, and who have lost their followers because they are of no benefit to them on the Resurrection Day.

It is said that *their followers* (ahlūhum) means their heavenly wives and servants in Paradise who would have been theirs had they only believed. This interpretation is not without merit considering the verses about inheriting Paradise.

This statement will be uttered by the believers on the Day of Resurrection—the past tense is used to signify that it will definitely come to pass—not in this world as some commentators have suggested. There is nothing in this context to suggest that God is quoting the statements of the believers in this world. Nor is this a statement uttered by all of the believers, no matter who they are, but rather it shall be uttered by the perfect believers who have been given leave to speak and speak only what is right on that Day, like Those upon the Heights (*aṣḥāb al-aʿrāf*) and the

witnesses of the deeds. God says:

The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave. (11:105)

None shall speak except whom the All-beneficent permits and who says what is right. (78:38)

It is not as some say: That this statement is only attributed to the believers to show their joy at the noble provision they are granted on that Day and at the fact they have been spared loss. Or else everyone who is gathered on that day and speaks will utter these words, just as everyone with sight on that day will see what was described above.

Now surely the iniquitous shall remain in lasting chastisement: This confirms that they shall be punished and that this punishment is everlasting and without end. It is also possible that this is part of what the believers say.

وَمَا كَانَ لَهُمْ مِنْ أَوْلِيَاءَ يَنْصُرُونَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ ﴿٤٦﴾

(42:46) ***And they never had any guardians to help them besides God; and— whomsoever God makes err, he shall have no way.***

God says *they never had any guardians* rather than *they shall have no guardian* as He said above to show that how obviously false their claims were of having any guardians in this world and that this was false from the very beginning.

…and whomsoever God makes err, he shall have no way: This can explain the beginning of the verse, and it serves as a general conclusion for everything that has been mentioned about the condition of the unjust and their fate.

It also has a connection to the prior discussion of why God promulgated a religion and the way in which He sent down revelation. This is because it alludes to the fact that there is no way to true happiness except the way which God has laid down for His servants by way of revelation and sending prophets. So whoever strays from His way by disbelieving and denying the way has no way to be guided to a felicitous outcome and be spared punishment and destruction.

اسْتَجِيبُوا لِرَبِّكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ ۚ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ مَلْجَإٍ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ نَكِيرٍ ﴿٤٧﴾

(42:47) ***Hearken to your Lord before there comes a day from God for which there shall be no averting; you shall have no refuge on that day, nor shall it be yours to make a denial.***

Based on its context, this verse is a summons and a warning about the Day of Resurrection mentioned in previous verses. Some say that *the day* here refers to the day of a person's death, but this is not sound.

When God says *for which there shall be no averting* (lā maradda lahu min allāh), the "no" is a categorical negation (*la nāfi al-jins*); "averting" (*maradda*) is its subject and "for which" (*lahu*) is its predicate. This means that there is a day from God which cannot be avoided, meaning it is a fixed decree (*muqtaḍī maḥtūm*) which God will never repel. This conveys the meaning oft-repeated in God's words that the Day of Resurrection is a day in which there is no doubt (*lā rayba fīh*).

Commentators have mentioned other possible grammatical analyses of the sentence *from God for which there is no escape*, but there is no benefit in mentioning them here.

…you shall have no refuge on that day, nor shall it be yours to make a denial: "A refuge" (*malja'*) is a place to which one betakes (*yaltaji' ilayh*) for shelter, and "a denial" (*nakīr*)—according to what has been said—is a verbal noun meaning "to deny". This renders the meaning: "You have nowhere to hide from God, nor can you deny what you have done because the matter will be clear from every angle."

فَإِنْ أَعْرَضُوا فَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا ۖ إِنْ عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ ۗ وَإِنَّا
إِذَا أَذَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنَّا رَحْمَةً فَرِحَ بِهَا ۖ وَإِنْ تُصِبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ
أَيْدِيهِمْ فَإِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ كَفُورٌ ﴿٤٨﴾

(42:48) ***But if they turn aside, We have not sent you as a watcher over them; on you is only to deliver [the message]; and surely when We make man taste mercy from Us, he rejoices thereat; and if an evil afflicts them on account of what their hands have already done, then surely man is most ungrateful.***

This turns from addressing them to address the Prophet directly to let him know that his only responsibility is conveying the message and nothing more; God has sent someone to preach His religion, and all he needs to do is convey it. He did not send him to watch their every action.

Nor is he responsible for their faith and obedience. So he does not need to prevent them from turning away from him or exhaust himself trying to get them to accept him.

…and surely when We make man taste mercy from Us, he rejoices thereat; and if an evil afflicts them on account of what their hands have already done, then surely man is most ungrateful: Rejoicing at God's mercy suggests that man becomes so preoccupied with the blessings that he forgets the source of those blessings. "An evil" means a calamity whose occurrence harms them. When God says *then surely man is most ungrateful*, He could have said "surely he is most ungrateful" but instead mentions "man" again, as mentioning him by name underscores the intended reprimand and condemnation.

The verse conveys a sense of them turning away and being rebuked as human beings who are preoccupied with the world, for man by his nature is an ally of forgetfulness; when he remembers a blessing he has been given, his joy diverts him from remembering God. But when he recalls some evil that befell him on account of what his hands had earned, ingratitude prevents him from remembering Him. So he is ever neglectful of his Lord's remembrance, whether he be blessed or put to trial. It is almost as if no amount of preaching or exhortation will avail him!

لِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۚ يَهَبُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ إِنَاثًا وَيَهَبُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ الذُّكُورَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(42:49) ***God's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He pleases; He grants to whom He pleases daughters and grants to whom He pleases sons.***

This verse and the one that follows it have a connection of sorts with the discussion of sustenance (*rizq*) above, in that the children mentioned therein are a kind of sustenance.

It is said: They are, in fact, connected with the previous verse. It mentions giving man a taste of mercy and then his being afflicted by hardship, saying that man rejoices at mercy and becomes ungrateful in hardship. So, in both of these verses, God means to say that the kingdom of the heavens and the earth are His and He creates whatever He wishes. So just because someone tastes His mercy and rejoices, he should not let himself be distracted by this, nor should anyone afflicted by evil let himself object

ungratefully. Rather to God belongs the Creation and the Command, so the one who receives mercy should give thanks and the one afflicted should return to Him.

However, this interpretation is rendered unlikely by the fact that God does not attribute the evil that befalls man in the previous verse to Himself, but rather to what man's hands have already done. Therefore it is not appropriate to attribute both situations mentioned in this verse to His will and call on mankind to submit to it.

In any case, when God says *God's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He pleases*, this says that all true dominion and authority in the universe is His alone, and that all of Creation depends upon His will—there is nothing that can compel Him to will or create anything.

***He grants to whom He pleases daughters* (ināth) *and grants to whom He pleases sons* (al-dhukūr).** The opposition between daughters and sons here suggests that this verse means He gives only daughters to whom He pleases and only sons to whom he pleases, and that is why the phrase *grants to whom He pleases* is repeated for both.

It is said: The reason why *sons* takes the definite article here is because that is what the listeners desired and had in their minds, especially if they were Arabs.

أَوْ يُزَوِّجُهُمْ ذُكْرَانًا وَإِنَاثًا ۖ وَيَجْعَلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ عَقِيمًا ۚ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

(42:50) *Or He pairs them, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren; surely He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful.*

Meaning He makes them of both sorts, as in the Arabic language, "to pair" (*tazwīj*) means "to combine" (*jamʿ*).

…and He makes whom He pleases barren… Meaning they neither bear children or father them. Like the first two clauses, this is also directly conditioned upon the Divine Will. As for the clause in which He combines both male and female, in reality He is merely combining the first two clauses, so it is sufficient that He mentions the Divine Will for them both.

…surely He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful: This explains the cause for what He mentioned above, namely that He is All-Knowing—He does not increase anything out of ignorance—and All-Powerful—He does not diminish everything out of impotence.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, both al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī transmit and authenticate from ʿAlī:
This verse was revealed about the People of the Step (*aṣḥāb al-ṣuffah*): *And if God should expand the provision for His servants they would certainly revolt in the earth*. This is because they said: "If only we had…" and then desired this world.

Author's comments: According to this, the verse would be Medinan, but the narration looks more like an application (*taṭbīq*) of the verse than the occasion of its revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*).

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* narrates about the verse *And if God should expand the provision for His servants they would certainly revolt in the earth* from Imam al-Ṣādiq:
Had he done, they would have done so. But instead he made them need one another and in this way He made them servants. And had He made them needless, they would have rebelled *but He sends it down according to a measure as He pleases* of that which will set them right in their religion and their worldly affairs. *Surely of His servants He is all-aware, all-seeing*.

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated from Anas, from the Prophet, from Gabriel, from God:
Verily, amongst my servants are those whom only illness benefits, and were I to make them healthy I would ruin them. Verily, amongst my servants are those whom only health benefits, and were I to make them ill I would ruin them. Verily, amongst my servants are those whom only wealth benefits, and were I to make them poor I would ruin them. Verily, amongst my servants are those whom only poverty benefits, and were I to make them wealthy I would ruin them. That is how I look after the affairs my servants because I know their hearts.

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, the author narrates from the Commander of the Faithful:[1]
I heard him say: "I will relate to you a tradition that every Muslim should be aware of." Then he approached us and said: "God does

1 The author narrates this from his father, from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from Manṣūr b. Yūnus, from Abū Ḥamzah, from al-Aṣbagh b. Nabātah, from the Commander of the Faithful.

not punish a believing servant in this world, save that God is too wise, generous and magnificent to punish him again on the Day of Resurrection!" Then he said: "God might try a believer with a trial in his body, his wealth, his children or his family." Then he recited the verse: *And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, yet He pardons many [of your faults]*, and gestured with his hand three times.

(5) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related through a chain of narration going back to Hishām b. Sālim from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq], who said: There is no pain that afflicts a person, nor calamity, nor injury, nor illness except on account of a sin. That is what God means when He says in the Qur'an: *And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and [yet] He pardons many [of your faults]*. And God forgives more than that for which He punishes.

Author's comments: And a tradition to this effect has been narrated via another chain from Masmaʿ, from him.

(6) A similar tradition is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from al-Ḥasan from the Prophet. It says:
When the verse came down, *And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and [yet] He pardons many [of your faults]*, God's Messenger said: "By He in whose hand is my soul, there is not a scratch, a pain, a calamity or even a tripping of a foot that is not because of a sin. But what God forgives of people's sins is more!"

(7) In *al-Kāfī*, via a chain of narrators going back to ʿAlī b. Riʾāb, he says:
I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about God's words: *And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and [yet] He pardons many [of your faults]*—"Do you mean that what befall ʿAlī and his Household after him was because of what their hands earned, while they are the Household of the pure and infallible ones?"
He responded: "Verily God's Messenger would seek repent to God and seek His forgiveness a hundred times in every day and night, without having committed any sin. But God distinguishes His *awliyāʾ* with hardships (*maṣāʾib*) in order to reward them in return!"

(8) And in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated from ʿAlī from the Prophet:

> This is the best verse (42:30) in the entire Book of God. O ʿAlī! There is no scratch or trip that occurs except because of a sin. But God is too magnanimous to punish people for what He forgives in this world, and He is too just to punish anyone again for something He has already punished [them for] in this world.

Author's comments: This is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from a number of traditions from ʿAlī, from the Prophet.

The implication of this narration is that the verse *And whatever affliction befalls you…* is specifically for the faithful and addressed to them, and this means that all their sins will be forgiven. They will not be punished for them in the *barzakh* or on the Day of Judgement. This is because the verse says that they will either be punished with an affliction in this world or forgiven for their sins, and the narration says there will be no punishment for sins that have already been punished in this world, nor shall any sins be punished having been forgiven in this world.

The problem with this tradition is, first, as you know the context of the verse indicates it is addressing everyone: the believers and the disbelievers.

Second, the contents of the tradition conflict with other traditions that are numerous enough to reach the level of successive narration in their meaning (*al-tawātur al-maʿnawī*). These say that the believers will be punished in his grave on in the Hereafter.

Third, this narration also differs from the meaning of numerous verses stating that the Hereafter is the place where deeds shall be recompensed. For example, God says: *Were God to take mankind to task for their wrongdoing, He would not leave any living being upon it. But He respites them until a specified time, so when their time comes they shall not defer it by a single hour nor shall they advance it* (16:61). And there are other verses that indicate every wrongdoing and sin will be punished, and that this punishment will take place after death and on the Day of Judgement, save for those which have been forgiven through repentance, effaced through good deeds, or removed through intercession in the Hereafter. Or something along these lines.

But as we have already seen, the verse under discussion—*And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and [yet] He pardons many [of your faults]*—does not clearly state that these afflictions are a recompense for people's deeds or that forgiveness here means that the recompense for these deeds has been removed. Rather it means that a person is sometimes spared the worldly effect of an evil deed, and other times they are not.

So if we are to accept this narration, we must understand it to be an encouragement for people to hold a good opinion of God (*ḥusn al-ẓann bi Allāh*).

(9) And it has been narrated in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, about the phrase *their rule is to take counsel among themselves*, that the Prophet said:
Never did a man seek the counsel of another save that he was guided aright.

(10) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, in a narration from Abū Jārūd from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir]:
He grants to whom He pleases daughters—meaning without any sons—*and grants to whom He pleases sons*—meaning without any daughters—*Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female*—meaning He gives whoever He pleases sons and daughters together; that is, he combines boys and girls by giving them both to one person.

(11) In *Tahdhīb*, it is related from ʿAlī:[1]
A man came to the Prophet, and said: "O Messenger of God, my father wanted a slave of mine, so he set him free in a way that was harmful to me."
God's Messenger replied: "You and your property are God's gift to your father, for you are like an arrow in his quiver; *He grants to whom He pleases daughters and grants to whom He pleases sons. Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren.* He is permitted to manumit your slave, for your father may make use of your person and your property, but you may not make any use of his person or property without his permission!"

Author's comments: This idea is also narrated from Imam al-Riḍā, in response to the questions of Muḥammad b. Sinān in *ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ*, and also by Sunni authorities from ʿĀʾishah, from the Prophet.

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1 It is related via a chain of narration going back to Ḥusayn b. ʿAlawān, from Zayd b. ʿAlī, from his forefathers, from ʿAlī.

Verses 51-53

These verses contain God's final description of Divine Revelation in this sūrah. It is divided into three categories: revelation, from behind a curtain, or by sending a messenger who reveals whatever God wishes by His permission. Then God says that He reveals whatever is revealed to the Prophet in this way, and whatever He reveals to him is not something the Prophet could have known by himself. Rather this revelation is a light by which God guides whomever He wishes of His servants and by which the Prophet also guides by His leave.

وَمَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُكَلِّمَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا وَحْيًا أَوْ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ
رَسُولًا فَيُوحِيَ بِإِذْنِهِ مَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّهُ عَلِيٌّ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥١﴾

(42:51) ***It is not for any human that God should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a curtain, or send a messenger who reveals by His permission whatever He wishes. Indeed He is all-exalted, all-wise.***

We have already discussed the meaning of Divine Speech in the second volume of this work.[1] The Qur'an uses the word "speech" (*kalām*) to describe His speech, and the verb "speaking to" (*taklīm*) for His action, whether this is in a literal sense or a figurative one. For example, we read: *He said, "O Moses, I have chosen you over the people with My messages and My speech. So take what I give you, and be among the grateful."* (7:144) and, *and to Moses God spoke directly* (4:164). One of the instances of His speech is what the Prophets receive from Him by way of revelation.

Based on this, there is no need to treat the exception in *except a revelation* as a discontinuous exception as revelation and the two categories mentioned after it are all forms of God speaking to human beings. It does not matter whether He is using this word in a literal or figurative sense, because each method—revelation, whatever is from behind a curtain or whatever is sent with a messenger—is a form of God's communication

1 See "A Philosophical Discussion on the Speech of Allah" in the exegesis of 2:253-254 in Volume 4 of the English translation. [Trans.]

with humankind.

So when God says *a revelation*—and the word "revelation" (*waḥī*) alludes to the speed at which this takes place according to Rāghib—this is a categorical object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*) to indicate the type (*nawʿ*) of speech, as are the two categories that follow it. This renders the meaning: It is not for a person that God should speak to them in any mode of speech except these three modes; namely revelation, from behind a curtain or by sending a messenger to reveal whatever He wishes by His leave.

The apparent meaning of the disjunction signified by *or* in this verse is to distinguish between the three different categories. The last two categories are distinguished by qualifies, such as *a curtain* or *a messenger* who reveals to the Prophet. But the first category is not qualified by anything, and this contrast would suggest that revelation in this sense refers to a subtle mode of communication that does not rely on any mediator between God and the Prophet. As for the other two categories, they are distinguished by the fact that they each have an additional qualifier, namely a curtain or a messenger who reveals on God's behalf, and each of these is a form of mediator. The difference between these two is that in one the mediator is a messenger who reveals to the Prophet himself, while the curtain is a mediator that does not actually reveal but the revelation comes from behind it.

We can deduce that the third category of revelation—*a messenger who reveals by His permission*—means revelation through the mediation of a messenger who is the angel of revelation. That angel reveals whatever God wishes to the Prophet by His leave. God says: *brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart* (26:193), and *Say, "Whoever is an enemy of Gabriel, it is he who has brought it down on your heart with the will of God…*" (2:97). However, even with this in mind, God is still the true revealer, as He says: *in what We have revealed to you of this Qur'an* (12:3).

Some commentators have suggested that "messenger" (*rasūl*) in the phrase *…or send a messenger who reveals by His permission whatever He wishes…* refers to the Prophet conveying the Divine Message to people. However, this is not compatible with the word *reveals* (*yūḥī*) because the word "reveals" is never used to describe the Prophet's conveyance (*tablīgh*).

The second kind of revelation, *…from behind a curtain…*, means with the mediation of the curtain (*ḥijāb*) between the Prophet and God. However, this mediator does not actually reveal to the Prophet in the same way as the messenger does in the third category. Instead we see that the

revelation begins from behind it based on the use of the particle "from" (*min*). Here, "behind" (*warāʾ*) does not mean literally at the back of the curtain, but rather something beyond the thing that encloses it. God says: *…and God besieges them from all around* (85:20). This is like when He spoke to Moses upon the mount: *When he approached it, he was called from the right bank of the valley at the blessed spot from the tree…* (28:30). And in this category of revelation is included that which is revealed to the Prophets in their dreams.

As for the first category, this refers to God speaking directly to the Prophet without any intermediary or barrier.

But insofar as all these ways in which God speaks to the Prophet are attributed to God, in spite of their obvious differences, it is proper to apply the term "revelation" (*waḥī*) to any one of them. It is with this in mind, that God attributes all revelation to Himself in the verse: *We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him* (4:163), and in the verse: *We did not send any before you except as men to whom We revealed* (16:43).

This is what can be gleaned by pondering the verse at hand. Commentators have many lengthy discussions and disagreements on this topic which we have avoided becoming bogged-down in here; anyone who is interested can refer to their books.

…Indeed He is all-exalted, all-wise: This serves to explain the reason for the contents of the verse. It is because of God's exaltation above creation and the natural order that He is too magnificent to speak to them as they speak to one another. But it is because of this exaltation and wisdom that He speaks to them in the modes of revelation He has chosen; it is in His nature to guide every species towards felicity. God says: *Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.* (20:50), and *With God rests guidance to the straight path* (16:9). And in order for the human being to pursue his felicity with knowledge and awareness, God must teach him what felicity means and show him a way of living that will bring him to it. The human intellect is not sufficient for this purpose because it is unreliable; sometimes right and sometimes wrong. So God chose to use revelation which is never wrong. And we have spoken extensively about this conclusive proof (*ḥujjah*) in other places of this work.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا ۚ مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا

الْإِيمَانُ وَلَٰكِنْ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ نَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ۚ وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

(42:52) ***Thus have We revealed to you the Spirit of Our dispensation. You did not know what the Book is, nor what is faith; but We made it a light that We may guide by its means whomever We wish of Our servants. And indeed you guide to a straight path,***

From the context it appears that *thus* (kadhālik) refers to what has been mentioned in the previous verse about the three categories of revelation. This reading is supported by numerous narrations indicating that just as the Prophet received revelation through Gabriel (which is the third category of revelation), he would also receive revelations in his dreams (the second category) and receive revelations directly without any intermediary (the first category).

It is said that this indicative pronoun ("thus") refers to any kind of revelation that was sent down to the Prophets. This rests on the assumption that by *spirit*, God means Gabriel or the Spirit of Command (*al-rūḥ al-amrī*), as we shall discuss.

By *revealed to you the Spirit*—according to what has been said—God means revealing the Qur'an, and this reading is supported by God saying: *…but We made it a light…* And it is on this basis that some say "spirit" here refers to the Qur'an itself.

However, several problems remain with this interpretation. First of all, there is no doubt that the context of the present discussion is explaining that whatever knowledge or teachings you have, act upon or call people towards, these are not teachings you grasped by yourself or produced on the basis of your own knowledge. Rather they have come to you from Us; We have sent them down to you by way of our revelation. On this basis, then if "spirit" referred to the revealer of the Qur'an, it would have been necessary to restrict it to the Book (*kitāb*) when God said: *You did not know what the Book is, nor what is faith*. This is because the meaning of "the Book" is the Qur'an, in which case faith would be rendered superfluous here.

Secondly, we can call the Qur'an a spirit insofar as it is gives life to hearts by its guidance, as God says: *…when he summons you to that which will give you life…* (8:24), and: *Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him*

life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people… (6:122). However, if this is what is meant here, then there is no need for us to qualify the word "spirit" with the phrase *Our dispensation* (*min amrinā*). Rather, the apparent meaning is that the Spirit of His dispensation (*al-rūḥ min amrihi*) is a creature from the higher realms that accompanies the angels in their descent, as God says:

In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. (97:4)

On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array. (78:38)

Say, "The Spirit is of the command of my Lord…." (17:85)

…and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit…. (2:87)

And Gabriel is also called the Trustworthy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) and the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudus*) when God says:

…brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit…. (26:193)

Say, the Holy Spirit has brought it down duly from your Lord…. (16:106)

One could reply to the first objection: Even if the above context required that God only mention the Book, belief in the contents of the book, of the knowledge and teachings it contains, is a logical corollary of sending it down; one which cannot be separated from it and its good effects. Therefore it is perfectly plausible to say: Thus we revealed to you a Book. You did not know what the Book is, or what a wonderful effect it would have on you, meaning your faith in it.

And to the second objection, it could be said: Even if the normal sense of "spirit" is what you have mentioned, here it must mean something else. This is because if "spirit" means the Spirit of Command or Gabriel, then the word "revealed" should mean "sent" but God does not say anywhere that He "revealed" the Spirit of Command or the Angel. So the word "revealed" must mean "sent", and this is far from ideal. In fact, it makes more sense to understand "spirit" to refer to the Qur'an than for "revealed" to mean "sent." And both responses are not without merit.

It is said: "Spirit" refers to Gabriel, because God calls him that in the Qur'an when He says: *…brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit…* (26:193), and: *Say, the Holy Spirit has brought it down duly from your Lord…* (16:106).

It is also said: "Spirit" refers to the Spirit of Command, which descends with the angels of revelation to the Prophets, as God says: *He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command to whomever He wishes of His servants: "Warn…!"* (16:2) And when He says He "revealed", He means

He "sent."

We could explain the use of "revealed" to mean "sent down" because according to the verse, *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be," and it is* (36:82), God's command is His word; and if the Spirit is of His command, as in the verse *The Spirit is of the command of my Lord* (17:85), then it is His word too. This is confirmed when God says about Jesus son of Mary *The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only an Messenger of God, and His Word that He cast toward Mary and a spirit from Him*. (4:171) Sending down the word (*kalimah*) means to speak (*taklīm*), and therefore there is no problem with saying that God sends down the Spirit through revelation while the Prophets are known to be confirmed in their actions by the Spirit, just as it reveals their teachings to them. God says: *and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit* (2:87). And we have mentioned this already when discussing the verse: …*and We revealed to them the performance of good deeds, the maintenance of prayers, and the giving of zakat*… (21:73).

It is also possible to remove the objection against "revealed" meaning "sending down" or "sending" by saying that *a Spirit* (rūḥan) is in the accusative case but with an implicit proposition in front of it (*nazᶜ al-khāfiḍ*).[1] In this case, the pronoun *it* still refers to the Qur'an or the Book, as this is known from the context of the verse. This would make the meaning: "Thus we revealed the Qur'an to you with a Spirit of Ours. You did not know what the Book is, or what Faith is. But we made the Qur'an (or the Book) a light… etc." But I do not know of any commentator who has adopted this opinion.

You did not know what the Book is, nor what is faith: As we mentioned above, the purpose of this verse is to explain that whatever the Prophet

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1 *Nazᶜ al-khāfiḍ:* A term from the Kufan school of Arabic Grammar which means that there is an implicit preposition (*ḥarf jārr*) after a verb. So for example, instead of saying "I passed by so-and-so" (*marartu bi fulānin*) [where the preposition interposes between the verb and noun, giving the noun following it a genitive declension (the *kasrah*)] you say "I passed so-and-so" (*marartu fulānan*) [the preposition is dropped and the verb takes the following noun as a direct object, giving it an accusative declension (the *fatḥah*)]. According to this theory, here the word "a Spirit" (*rūḥan*) actually means "with a Spirit" (*bi rūḥin*), with the preposition "*bi*" being omitted on the basis of this grammatical rule and "a Spirit" becoming accusative as a result. [Trans.]

has that he is calling people to embrace is only from God and not from himself, and that whatever he has been given has been received through revelation after he was made a prophet. So when the Qur'an says he did not know what the Book is, it means he had no knowledge of what knowledge, practical teachings, or doctrines it contained. That is the knowledge that was given to him after he became a prophet who received revelation. When it says he did not know what faith was, this means that he did not adhere to true doctrines and righteous deeds in all their details. And the word "faith" (*īmān*) is used to refer to actions in the verse: *And God would not let your faith go to waste* (2:143).

Based on this, we can construe the meaning thus: Before We revealed the Book to you through Our Spirit, and all the knowledge and teachings it contains, you were not engaged in what you are doing now. In other words, you did not adhere in belief or practice to its contents. However, this does not conflict with him being a believer in God or a monotheist before being made a prophet, or his conduct being righteous. The only thing that the verse is negating here is the Prophet having detailed knowledge of the Book or adhering to it in his beliefs and practices in a detailed sense; this does not conflict with him having a general knowledge or adherence to faith in God and submission to the Truth.

This refutes the claim some make on the basis of this verse that the Prophet did not believe before receiving revelation.

It also refutes the opposite claim that his knowledge was already complete and his action already perfect before he was made a prophet. The verse highlights precisely this distinction between before and after; he contributed nothing to what he acquired after being made a prophet—it came only from God by way of revelation.

…but We made it a light that We may guide by its means whomever We wish of Our servants: "It" in …*We made it*… refers to the Spirit.

And, if we assume that the Spirit is the spirit of the Qur'an, then *whomever We wish* means the Prophet and those that believe in him, for they are all guided by the Qur'an.

But if we take the Spirit to refer to the Spirit of Command, then *whomever We wish* means all of the Prophets and everyone from their communities who believed in them. After all, the Spirit guides whoever it came down to with revelation; the Prophets and the faithful of their communities. But the Spirit gives special guidance to the Prophets and directs them towards righteous deeds.

On this basis, this verse should be read in the context of confirming the Prophet; it confirms his claim that the Book has been given to him through God's revelation, and it confirms his claim that he believes in that which he enjoins upon other people. If so, then the verse is in the same vein as God's saying: *you are indeed one of the Messengers, on a straight path sent down gradually from the All-mighty, the All-merciful* (36:5).

And indeed you guide to a straight path: This alludes to the fact that what the Prophet guides people to is a straight path, and that anyone who is guided by the Prophet is guided by God—his guidance is identical with God's guidance.

صِرَاطِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ أَلَا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَصِيرُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٥٣﴾

(42:53) ***the path of God, to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Look! To God do all matters return!***

This serves to explain the meaning of the Straight Path to which the Prophet guides people. When God describes Himself as *to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth* this is to say that this is the proof for his path being the right one. In other words, because God is the master of all things, He is also the master of the ultimate purpose to which all things move towards and their fulfilment and felicity. So it is the ultimate purpose is fulfilment itself, and the path that people must take to attain their felicity is the one He has provided and made clear. No one possesses anything which can provide them with a purpose or goal, or provide them with an alternative route to their purpose. Therefore, the felicity which God calls people towards is true happiness and fulfilment, and the path which He calls them to walk upon is the True Way and the Straight Path.

Look! To God do all matters return!: This calls attention to the logical corollary of God possessing everything in the heavens and the earth, namely that all the affairs associated with them ultimately return to Him. The logical corollary of this in turn is that the path they take—which is one of their affairs—must return to Him also. So the Straight Path is His Path. And here the imperfect tense (*muḍāriʿ*) is used in *return* (taṣīr) to signify continuity.

And this alludes to the kernel of Revelation and Divine Speech; namely that insofar as all things return to God, every species has a path it must traverse in order to reach Him, and He must guide it and lead it towards its ultimate purpose. God says: *With God rests guidance to the straight path* (16:9). This means speaking to each species in a way that accords with its essence (*dhāt*). In the case of human beings, this is the kind of speaking known as revelation and sending messengers.

It is said that the imperfect tense is used to signify future occurrence (*istiqbāl*), and so everything returning to Him means on the Day of Resurrection. In this case, the sentence must be understood in the context of promising reward to those guided upon the Straight Path and warning of punishment for those who stray from it. However the previous interpretation is closer to the apparent meaning of the text.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Bukhārī, Muslim, and Bayhaqī narrate from ʿĀʾishah:
al-Ḥārith b. Hishām asked God's Messenger: "How does revelation come to you?"
He replied: "Sometimes the angel comes to me in the likeness of a bell's ringing, then it ceases and I have understood what he said, and this is the hardest kind of revelation for me. Sometimes he takes the form of a man and speaks to me, and I understand what he says."
ʿĀʾishah added: "I saw the revelation come down to him on an extremely cold day. By the time it finished, the sweat was dripping from his forehead."

(2) And in *al-Tawḥīd*, via a chain of narrators going back to Zurārah:
I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: "May I be your ransom, did God's Messenger used to feel faint when revelation came down to him?"
He replied: "That was when there was no one between him and God; that was when God revealed Himself to Him… that is prophethood, O Zurārah!" And he came forth looking humbled.

(3) And in *ʿIlal*, via a chain of narrators going through Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from ʿAmr b. Jamīʿ from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:
When Gabriel came to the Prophet, he would sit before him like a servant and would not enter his presence without first asking

his permission.

(4) And in the *al-Amālī* of the *Shaykh*, with a chain of narrators going through Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from Hishām b. Sālim:
Some of our colleagues asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: "May God make you prosper, God's Messenger would say: 'Gabriel says…', 'This Gabriel has bid me do…' but at other times he would become faint!"
Abū ʿAbd Allāh said: "When the revelation was directly from God—without Gabriel acting as an intermediary—then the Prophet was afflicted thus because of the weight of the revelation. But when Gabriel was between them, he was not afflicted with this. He would say: 'Gabriel told me…' and 'This is Gabriel….'"

(5) In *Baṣāʾir*, from ʿAlī b. Ḥissān, from Ibn Bakīr, from Zurārah:
I asked Abū Jaʿfar: "Who is a messenger (*rasūl*)? Who is a prophet (*nabī*)? Who is spoken-to (*muḥaddath*)?"
He told me: "A messenger is one to whom Gabriel comes and speaks. So he sees him as one of you sees his companion when speaking to him. This is a messenger. The Prophet is one who is given revelation in his dreams like Abraham's vision, and what God's Messenger would receive while asleep when Gabriel would visit him in dreams. This is how a prophet is. And then there are those who combine being a messenger with being a prophet, so God's Messenger was a prophet-messenger; Gabriel would come and speak to him and he could see him, and he would also come to him while asleep. As for one spoken-to (*muḥaddath*), this means they hear the speech of the angel without seeing him, and the angel does not come to them while they are asleep."

Author's comments: There are other narrations in this vein.

(6) In *al-Tawḥīd*, with a chain of narration going through Muḥammad b. Muslim and Muḥammad b. Marwān from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:
God's Messenger only knew that Gabriel came from God because of Divine Assistance (*tawfīq*).

(7) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, from Zurārah:
I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: "How is it that God's Messenger was not afraid that what he was receiving from God could have been tampered with by Satan?"
He said: "When God takes someone as a servant and a messenger,

He sends down tranquillity (*sakīnah*) and clear-headedness (*waqār*) to them. So he could see what came to him from God as clearly as he saw things with his own eyes."

(8) In *Kāfī*, with a chain of narration going back to Abū Baṣīr:
I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about God's saying: *Thus have We revealed to you the Spirit of Our dispensation. You did not know what the Book is, nor what is faith.*
He told me: "God has created a being even greater than Gabriel and Michael that was with God's Messenger and would inform him and advise him on his proper conduct, and this creature is with the Imams after him."

Author's comments: There are a number of narrations which say this, and some of them say this being is from the imaginal realm (*malakūt*).

(9) In *Rūh al-Maʿānī*, Ṭabrisī relates from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:
What is meant by this spirit is an angel that is greater than Gabriel or Michael who was with God's Messenger and did not ascend to the heavens.
Ālūsī, the author of *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* says: "Such a statement is very strange, to the extent that it might not be authentically from these two Imams." But if we look in Ṭabrisī's own work, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, the tradition reads: "…It did not ascend to the heavens but remains with us instead."
Ālūsī's aversion to this tradition on the basis of something which there is no evidence to contradict is itself strange. This is especially so when we see he accepts the idea that this spirit could have guided other members of the *ummah* besides the Prophet, as is clear for anyone who studies the remarks he makes in his commentary.

(10) In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, we read [that Imām ʿAlī said]:
God joined [this Spirit] to him ever since he was weaned. It is an angel greater than all the others, by which one walks upon the path of noble behaviours and beautiful morals (*ṭarīq al-makārim wa maḥāsin al-akhlāq*) day and night.

11. In *al-Dūrr al-Manthūr*, it is narrated from Abū Naʿīm in *Dalāʾil* and Ibn ʿAsākir from ʿAlī:
It was said to the Prophet: "Have you ever needed to repeat an act of worship?" He said: "No." The people asked: "Have you ever

drank wine?" He said: "No. And I still knew that that which they follow is infidelity (*kufr*) even though I did not know what the Book was or faith." And in this regard the verse was revealed: *You did not know what the Book is, nor what is faith*.

(11) In *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narrators going back through Abū ʿAmr al-Zubaydī from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:
God said of the Prophet: *And indeed you guide to a straight path*. Meaning you call people towards one.

(12) And in *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narrators going back to Jābir, from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir]:
I [the narrator] heard him say: "A copy of the Qur'an fell into the ocean. When they found it, everything had been washed away except this verse: *Look! To God do all matters return!*"

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Chapter 43

Sūrah al-Zukhruf

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Verses 1-14

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah is composed as a warning (*indhār*) as evinced by its opening, its conclusion, and the topics that intervene between them. The obvious exception being the digression that takes place between verses 67 and 73, beginning with the phrase …*except for the Godwary, "O My servants! Today you will have no fear, nor will you grieve…"* (43:67–68).

It says that it is the Divine Custom *(sunnah ilāhiyyah*) to send reminders with prophets and messengers. People's immoderation in words and deeds do not prevent God from doing this; in fact, He sends prophets and messengers and causes those who deride and deny them to perish before driving them towards eternal punishment.

At first, the sūrah mentions sending prophets in general, before naming Abraham, Moses, and Jesus one after another. Thereafter it turns to discuss the immoderation of the faithless; things like them wilfully claiming that God has a son or that the angels are His daughters. This sūrah demonstrates a special concern with negating the idea that God has any offspring by repeating this, refuting it, and threatening them with punishment for claiming it. In addition to this, various other realities are also discussed.

Based on the content of the verses, the sūrah appears Meccan, except for the verse *Ask those of Our Messengers We have sent before you…* (43:45). However, as we shall hopefully discuss, this has not been established.

حم ﴿١﴾ وَالۡكِتَابِ الۡمُبِينِ ﴿٢﴾

(43:1-2) *Ḥā, Mīm. By the Manifest Book.*

This appears to be an oath (*qasam*) whose consequent (*jawāb*) is *We*

have made it an Arabic Qur'an… surely sublime and wise. When we call the Qur'an "manifest" (*mubīn*), this either means it makes visible and clarifies the path of guidance, as God says: *We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things* (16:89); or it means that it is clear in itself and without doubt, as in the verse *This is the Book, there is no doubt in it* (2:2).

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إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(43:3) ***We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason,***

It refers to *the Manifest Book*.

An Arabic Qur'an means recited in the Arabic language.

So that you may apply reason is the ultimate purpose for which it was made in this way.

That God makes *so that you may apply reason* the purpose for making it an Arabic Qur'an suggests that the Book has a level of existence and being which is beyond the reach of human intellects. It is the nature of the intellect to grasp any concept, no matter how subtle or delicate. So this verse shows that the Book, at its native level of existence, is suprarational; something alien to human thought. God only made the Qur'an Arabic and clothed it in human language in order that human intellects could become acquainted with it and comprehend its meaning. And when God says *so that you may*, the element of possibility rests with the context or the addressee but never with the speaker, as we have mentioned more than once.

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وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلِيٌّ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

(43:4) ***and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book, surely sublime and firm.***

This confirms and clarifies the implication of the previous verse, namely that the Book, at its native level of existence, is beyond the comprehension of the human intellect.

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It refers to the Book.

The Mother Book (*umm al-kitāb*) means the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), as the verse says: *Rather it is a glorious Qur'an in a preserved tablet* (85:21–22). It is called "the Mother Book" because it is the origin from which all the revealed scriptures were transcribed. Qualifying "the

Mother Book" as being "with Us" is to clarify rather than distinguish it from any other. This means that its state of being in the Mother Book with Us—a necessary state—is sublime and wise. At the end of Sūrah al-Jāthiyah there is another mention of the Mother Book which we shall look at, God-willing.

Based on the tenor of the previous verse, *sublime* (ʿalī) means its value is too great and its station too exalted for human minds to reach. On the other hand, *firm* (*ḥakīm*) suggests that it is epistemically dense (*muḥkam*) and not elaborated or divided into *sūrah*s, verses, sentences, and words, as it is once it has been made an Arabic Qur'an. We can deduce this from God's saying: *a Book, whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated, from One all-wise, all-aware* (11:1).

These two qualities—*sublime* and *firm*—are what necessitate its being beyond the grasp of human intellects, for the intellect can only grasp things that are first composed of concepts and words, then from logical propositions that follow on from one another, as we see in the verses and sentences of the Qur'an. However, if something exists beyond the realm of concepts and words without being divided into parts and sections, there is simply no way for the intellect to grasp it.

So, in short, these two verses mean that the Book with Us in the Guarded Tablet has an exalted station too lofty and dense for the human intellect to grasp. And We only sent it down by making it an Arabic recitation in order that people could comprehend it.

If one were to argue (*in qulta*):[1] The apparent meaning of the words *so that you may apply reason* is in order that people could comprehend this Arabic Qur'an completely. So what we read and comprehend here either corresponds fully to the contents of the Mother Book or it does not, and the latter is definitely false. How? Because of God's saying *And indeed it is in… the Mother Book, Rather it is a glorious Qur'an in a preserved tablet* (85:21–22); *This is indeed a noble Qur'an in a guarded book* (56:77–78). This shows that it must correspond fully to the contents of the Mother Book. With this in mind, what sense does it make to say that we can understand the Arabic Qur'an we have in our possession, but not what is with God in the Mother Book?

1 Lit. "If you said…." This is a traditional prefix to signify that the author is introducing the counter-arguments to his own theories with the intention of rebutting them. [Trans.]

Reply: The relation between that which is in our possession and that which is in the Mother Book could be that of a similitude to the thing it represents (*nisbat al-mithl wa al-mumaththal*); a similitude is identical to the thing it represents but the one for whom it is made only understands the similitude. So understand this.

From the above, the weakness of interpretations offered by other commentators for these two qualities becomes clear. For example, some say that it is *sublime* in its eloquence and its clarification of what people need. Others say that this means it is above all other books[1] because of its inimitable eloquence and because it abrogates all other books but no other book abrogates it. Still others say this means that the angels and the believers praise it.

As for *firm*, some say this means it displays extreme wisdom.[2] Others say it means that whatever the Qur'an says is wise, true, and correct, and it can be called "wise" (*ḥakīm*) for the purposes of hyperbole.

The weakness of all these interpretations is all obvious when you reflect on the previous verse, and its apparent meaning that making it an Arabic Qur'an involved sending it down from the Mother Book.

أَفَنَضْرِبُ عَنْكُمُ الذِّكْرَ صَفْحًا أَنْ كُنْتُمْ قَوْمًا مُسْرِفِينَ ۝٥

(43:5) ***Shall We then strike the Reminder from you unconcernedly, because you are a profligate lot?***

This is a rhetorical question intended as a rebuke. *Then* (fa) indicates it follows logically from the above.

…*strike the Reminder from you* means to turn it aside from you. Ṭabriṣī says in *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*:

> The origin [of this figure of speech] is that when a rider wanted to turn his mount away from a certain direction, he would strike it with a stick or whip on that side to turn it in another direction. Then "strike" (*ḍarb*) gradually took on the meaning of "to turn aside."

Unconcernedly (safḥ) literally means "to turn away" (*iᶜrāḍ*), so this is

1 This is a literal understanding of the Arabic *ʿalī*, which comes from *yaᶜlū* ("to be above"). [Trans.]

2 As one of the primary meanings for the adjective *ḥakīm* is "wise," although the literal meaning of the root *ḥ-k-m* means "to be firm." [Trans.]

the act's motivational object (*mafʿūl lah*).

This renders the meaning: Shall we then withhold the Reminder—which is the Book which we made an Arabic Qur'an for you to read—from you out of a lack of concern for you because you are a profligate lot, or should we not?

وَكَمْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ نَبِيٍّ فِي الْأَوَّلِينَ ۝٦ وَمَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْ نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ ۝٧

(43:6–7) ***How many a prophet We have sent to the ancients! There did not come to them any prophet but that they used to deride him.***

How many… (kam) signifies a great multitude.

The ancients (al-awwalūn) refer to the well-known peoples.

The sentence *there did not come to them…* is adverbial (*ḥāl*) for the verb *We have sent*.

These two verses and those that follow them should be read in the context of explaining why God does not withhold the Reminder from them. They say: Just because you are a profligate people, this does not prevent us from applying the Divine Custom of giving guidance through Divine Revelation. Many a time have We sent a prophet to earlier nations, even though they would always deride them, and this led us to destroy nations who were much mightier than you!

So just as the Reminder was never withheld from them as a consequence of their profligacy and derision, but rather they were destroyed, your profligacy shall have the same outcome. So as you can see, these three verses implicitly promise the Prophet divine support and threaten his people with punishment.

فَأَهْلَكْنَا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ بَطْشًا وَمَضَىٰ مَثَلُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ۝٨

(43:8) ***So We destroyed those whose violence was more severe than these, and the example of the ancients has passed.***

Rāghib says: *Violence* (baṭsh) means "to take something by force."

In this verse there is a transition from addressing the audience in the second-person ("you") to speaking about them in the third-person to the Prophet—*than these*. The reason for this is because they do not pay any attention to these stories or draw any lessons from them, and in

preparation for the phrase: *and the example of the ancients has passed.* This is supported by Him saying to the Prophet at the beginning of the next verse: *If you* [sing.] *ask them…*

When God says *the example of the ancients has passed*, this means that *sūrah*s of the Qur'an revealed before this one describe these nations and how the very thing they derided befell them.

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ خَلَقَهُنَّ الْعَزِيزُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

(43:9) ***If you ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" they will surely say, "The All-mighty, the All-knowing created them."***

This verse and the six that follow it provide a conclusive argument for God's Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) and the fact He is the sole possessor thereof by referring to the resurrection. They also rebuke them for their profligacy on the basis of their confession that God is the creator of everything. Then they look at the different dimensions of the Creation which reveal that He looks after the affairs of His servants, such as making the earth a cradle for them, carving out routes upon it for them to follow, and sending down rains. They conclude that God alone is the Sovereign and Organizer of their affairs. He is the Lord and there is no Lord besides Him.

With this in mind, the present verse clearly serves as an introduction to the arguments contained in the following verses. We have already mentioned elsewhere in this work that the Idolaters did not deny that the creation and origination of the universe went back to God alone; they merely claimed that the running of the universe went back to others as well.

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا سُبُلًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(43:10) ***He, who made the earth a cradle for you and made in it ways for you, so that you may be guided.***

Meaning He made the earth a place in which you could grow just as infants grow in the cradle. He made ways and routes for you to travel upon in the earth and thereby be guided to your destinations.

It is said: *So that you may be guided* means so that you may be guided to know God and that only He is worthy of your worship. However the first reading is closer to the apparent meaning of the text.

In this verse we see God returns to address the people, having turned away from them to address the Prophet. Perhaps this is to demonstrate the importance of this concept about creation, namely that the running of the universe is identical with its creation. So when they admit that God alone created the universe but claim that other creations are responsible for running it, this is utterly incoherent. And He addresses them directly to strike them with this argument.

وَالَّذِى نَزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَنْشَرْنَا بِهِ بَلْدَةً مَيْتًا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ تُخْرَجُونَ ﴿١١﴾

(43:11) ***And who sent down water from the sky in a measured manner, and We revived with it a dead country. Thusly you shall be brought forth.***

God qualifies the sending down of water from the sky with *in a measured manner* to show that the quantity of rain is intentional and planned rather than random. "To revive" means to give life, and describing a country as "dead" suggests that it is a physical place, because a country can only be described as alive or dead insofar as it is considered a physical locale. We also see that God transitions from speaking about Himself in the third-person (*and who sent down…*) to the first-person (*…and We revived…*) to again convey His concern for this point.

But as well as arguing that He is the creator and organizer of the universe on the basis of sending rain and reviving a dead country, God derives a third conclusion from this; a conclusion, without which, Divine Unity could not be considered complete. That conclusion is Resurrection, which represents the return of everything to Him. He says: *Thusly you shall be brought forth.* This means: Just as He revives a dead land, so too shall you be resurrected alive from your graves.

It is said that when He calls bringing forth vegetation "revival" which means giving life to the dead, and calls their resurrection "bringing forth", this magnifies the feat of bringing forth plants while belittling the difficulty of the Resurrection. And that He does this in order to provide an example of sound argumentation.

وَالَّذِى خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الْفُلْكِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مَا تَرْكَبُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(43:12) ***And who created all the pairs and made for you the ships and the cattle such as you ride,***

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It is said: *Pairs* refers to all kinds of beings, whether male or female, black or white, etc.

It is said: *Pairs* refers to everything; so everything God has made, like up and down, right and left, or male and female, is a pair.

…and made for you the ships and the cattle such as you ride: In Arabic, the verb "ride" (*rukūb*) can be applied directly to animals such as horses and camels. So you would say: "I rode a horse." However, when used in conjunction with something like a boat or a ship, it must be made transitive with the preposition "in/on" (*fī*). So you would say: "I rode on a boat." That is why God says: *When they ride on the ship…* (29:65). However, here "ride" is used without a preposition because boats are mentioned alongside animals.

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لِتَسْتَوُوا عَلَىٰ ظُهُورِهِ ثُمَّ تَذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ رَبِّكُمْ إِذَا اسْتَوَيْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ وَتَقُولُوا سُبْحَانَ الَّذِى سَخَّرَ لَنَا هَٰذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لَهُ مُقْرِنِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

(43:13) ***that you may sit on their backs, then remember the blessing of your Lord when you are settled on them, and say, "Immaculate is He who has disposed this for us, and we were no match for it."***

Sit on their backs means to be steady on their backs, and the pronoun *their* (which appears as masc. sing.) refers to "such as" in *such as you ride*. And the pronoun *them* (also masc. sing.) also refers to this. For just as one can say "I sat upon the back of a beast", you can also say "I sat upon a beast."

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…remember the blessing of your Lord when you are settled on them... meaning upon a beast of burden or a boat. It means remembering the ways in which man benefits from these modes of transportation to him which God has disposed for him. For example, he can move from one place to another or carry heavy loads with him. God says: *And He disposed the ships for you so that they may sail at sea by His command* (14:32), and: *He created the cattle… And they bear your burdens to towns which you could*

not reach except by straining yourselves (16:5–7). It could also mean being inspired to remember all of God's blessings by this particular one.

…and say, "Immaculate is He who has disposed this for us, and we were no match for it": Meaning, they were not able to do it themselves.

Apparently, to remember a blessing when making use of it and benefiting from it means to thank the one who gave it. Therefore, remembering God's blessing cannot just be to say *Immaculate is He…* as this is glorifying (*tasbīḥ*) and sanctifying (*tanzīh*) God of whatever does not befit His greatness, namely a partner in lordship or divinity. Remembering a blessing means giving thanks, and thanksgiving is not sanctification.

This reading is supported by what has been narrated from the Prophet and Imams of his Household, about what is said when sitting upon a mount, for despite their differences, these narrations all include descriptions of giving praise (*taḥmīd*) beyond the glorification *Immaculate is He….*

In *Kashshāf*, Zamakhsharī includes a narration from Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, which says he saw a man ride a beast and say: *Immaculate is He who has disposed…* So he said: "Were you commanded to do this?" The man asked: "So what were we commanded to do?" He said: "To remember the blessing of your Lord!"

وَإِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا لَمُنْقَلِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(43:14) ***"Indeed we shall turn towards our Lord"***

Meaning, they shall return to Him. This bears witness to the Resurrection.

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Verses 15–25

Here, God relates some of the things that they say which cause them to be labelled as profligates and ingrates. This includes their preference of sons, while they call the angels God's daughters, and the arguments they make for worshipping the angels. Then God takes them to task for these things.

وَجَعَلُوا لَهُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ جُزْءًا ۚ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَكَفُورٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٥﴾

(43:15) ***They ascribe to Him an offspring from among His servants! Man is indeed a manifest ingrate.***

The word God uses for "an offspring" in this verse is *juzʾ*, which literally means part, as a child is merely a part of her parents that has become separated from them and takes on their form. The reason God uses this word for child is to demonstrate the impossibility of their claim, as something can only be made a part of another thing—however we want to imagine this taking place—if the thing it is taken from composite (*murakkab*) in nature, while God is absolutely and indivisibly one from all aspects.

Based on the above, *from among His servants* (min ʿibādih) is to clarify the meaning of *an offspring* (*juzʾ*). There is no problem with this explanatory phrase coming before the clause it is explaining, or that this clause is singular while the phrase is plural.

أَمِ اتَّخَذَ مِمَّا يَخْلُقُ بَنَاتٍ وَأَصْفَاكُمْ بِالْبَنِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

(43:16) ***Did He adopt daughters from what He creates while He preferred you with sons?***

Meaning: Did he single you out for sons while he has only daughters, and you think that daughters are worth less than sons? Meaning that you assign him the less valuable gender while preferring the more valuable one for yourselves? Even though such a claim is clearly impossible in and of itself, this question serves to disgrace this phenomenon and rebuke the faithless for their ingratitude.

God qualifies the phrase *adopt daughters* with *from what He creates* because the idolaters said that the angels—despite being endowed with

lordship and divinity in their minds—were ultimately created by God. The transition in address (*iltifāt*) from the third-person ("they") to the second person (*you* pl.) is to emphasize and intensify the rebuke. Also, in the Arabic, *daughters* is left indefinite (*banātin*) while *sons* is given the definite article to belittle and aggrandize respectively.

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُمْ بِمَا ضَرَبَ لِلرَّحْمَٰنِ مَثَلًا ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧﴾

(43:17) ***When one of them is brought the news of that the like of which he ascribes to the All-beneficent, his face becomes darkened and he chokes.***

A *like* (mathal) means something similar to and belonging to the same category of a thing; so *that the like of which he ascribes to the All-beneficent* is a female child.

"One who chokes" (*kaẓīm*) means one who is filled with distress and anger.

This means: At the same time as they ascribe daughters to God, when one of them is given news of a daughter, their face darkens with grief and their hearts are filled with distress and anger because they are displeased with being given a girl. They consider having a daughter to be a source of shame, yet they are satisfied that God should have daughters!

The transition in this verse from the second-person ("you") to the third person ("they") is as if to relate their woeful behavior and evil attitudes to an outsider so that he is shocked by them!

أَوَمَنْ يُنَشَّأُ فِي الْحِلْيَةِ وَهُوَ فِي الْخِصَامِ غَيْرُ مُبِينٍ ﴿١٨﴾

(43:18) ***What! One who is brought up amid ornaments and is inconspicuous in contests?***

In other words, "Do they ascribe to God one who is raised amongst jewelry, grows up surrounded by finery and shows no promise in contests and arguments because she is unable to present her case?"

God only mentions these two attributes because women are naturally endowed with superior faculties of emotion and empathy than men, but are usually disadvantaged in reason, while men are the opposite. One of the most obvious signs of this is a woman's strong appreciation of beautiful

things coupled with her difficulty in formulating logical arguments.

وَجَعَلُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عِبَادُ الرَّحْمَٰنِ إِنَاثًا ۚ أَشَهِدُوا خَلْقَهُمْ ۚ سَتُكْتَبُ شَهَادَتُهُمْ وَيُسْأَلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(43:19) ***And they have made the angels—who are servants of the All-beneficent—females. Were they witness to their creation? Their testimony will be written down and they shall be questioned.***

This is the meaning of their claim that the angels are God's daughters. Some tribes of pre-Islamic Arabs believed this. Other idolaters perhaps considered that their deities had a mother deity or a daughter deity, without necessarily claiming that all of the angels were females as the verse appears to suggest.

And God describes the angels as *who are servants of the All-beneficent* to refute their claim that the angels are feminine, as the word "servants" (*ʿibād*) is not used for females. At the same time, however, this does not necessitate their being masculine in the same way that we describe living things as masculine. Being male or female is a corollary of our material existence and a means by which material creatures are able to procreate and multiply. The angels are far removed from all of that.

Were they witness to their creation? Their testimony will be written down and they shall be questioned: This refutes their claim that the angels are females, because the only way they could know that is if they had seen the angels visibly, which they had no way of doing; so they were not present at their creation to discern this for themselves!

When God says *Were they witness to their creation?* This is a rhetorical question meant as a rebuke and a warning against their speaking without knowledge. In other words: They did not witness their creation, and what they fabricate will be written against them in the record of their deeds so that they may be questioned about it on the Day of Resurrection.

وَقَالُوا لَوْ شَاءَ الرَّحْمَٰنُ مَا عَبَدْنَاهُمْ ۗ مَا لَهُمْ بِذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ ۖ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(43:20) ***They say, "Had the All-beneficent wished, we would not have worshipped them." They do not have any knowledge of that, and they do nothing but surmise.***

This is one of the foolish arguments the Qur'an relates from them. We can read it as justifying the worship of idols as follows: "Had God willed, we would not have worshipped associates with Him. We would have necessarily not worshipped them because we could not go against the will of God. But we worshipped them, so this means He did not will for us not to worship them, which is tantamount to saying that He allowed us to do it. This means He has no problem with us worshipping associates, including the angels." And this same argument is what comes to mind when we read the verse, *The polytheists say, "Had God wished, we would not have worshiped anything besides Him— neither we, nor our fathers— nor would we have held anything holy besides Him"* (16:35), based on the context immediately before and after it.

But we can also read this argument as an attempt to refute a form of prophethood which says "God has made such-and-such obligatory for you, and made such-and-such forbidden for you." This argument functions as follows: "Had God wished us not to worship associates, or for us not to permit or prohibit anything, we would not have worshipped these associates or made up any of our own laws, because it is impossible to oppose God's will. But we do worship them and make up our own laws, so clearly God has not willed anything from us. So when you say that God wants us to do this or does not want us to do that—in short, that He wills such a thing—this is false!"

And this second argument comes to mind when we read the verse: *The polytheists will say, "Had God wished we would not have ascribed any partner [to Him], nor our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything"* (6:148). This is again with regards to the context.

But when we look at the verse under discussion—*Had the All-beneficent wished, we would not have worshipped them*—and the context of the verses that surround it, this reads more like the first argument than the second. In other words, they are justifying their worship of the angels. So this verse is in the sense of the verse from Sūrat al-Naḥl, and actually more specific in its tenor.

They do not have any knowledge of that: In other words, this argument they make rests on ignorance. It is based on fallacious reasoning that confuses the creative aspect of the Divine Will (*al-irādah al-tawkīniyyah*) with its moral aspect (*al-irādah al-tashrīʿiyyah*), putting the former in the place of the latter. The implication of their argument is that there is no *creative* will against them worshipping angels, but even though this may

be the case, it does not necessarily follow that there is no *moral* will against their worship of them!

This is because, insofar as God did not will for them not to worship partners with His creative will, they have free-will and are not compelled in their actions. They can choose to do something or not to do it. Instead, He willed that they should believe in His Divine Unity and not worship any associates with Him using His *moral* will. But, unlike the *creative* will, it is possible to contravene God's *moral* will, because it is something conceptual rather than real; it only exists in the form of religious codes, laws, moral obligations, and its essence is whether a particular action is conducive to human good or human harm.

Based on this, the error of those who argue as follows becomes clear: Their argument rests on two premises. The first is that their worship of the angels is by God's will. The second is that this necessarily implies that He is pleased with the action. In the first, they were correct. But in the second they erred, as they were unaware that the Divine Will refers to some contingent phenomena—whatever they may be—being given preponderance over others, without this telling us anything about God's pleasure or displeasure in either group of phenomena.

Their error is as follows: The thread of the idolaters' argument is that God *did not* will them to *not* worship the angels. However, just because He did not will them to not do one thing does not imply that He willed them to do it. Rather the most this implies is permission (*idhn*), meaning that there is nothing preventing them from doing it. Then, moreover, it seems as though the above commentator restricts the Divine Will to its creative aspect and neglects its moral aspect, around which revolve all our divinely-imposed duties, and this is an error on his part.

So too is the error of the following reading apparent: Some commentators are supposed to have said that the meaning of their words *Had the All-beneficent wished, we would not have worshipped them* is to excuse their worshipping of the angels by attributing it to God's will, while admitting that it is an improper thing to do.

This is an erroneous reading because the idolaters did not accept that it was improper for them to worship their deities. In fact, they argue the opposite below: *We found our fathers following a creed, and we are indeed guided in their footsteps.*

…and they do nothing but surmise. "To surmise" (*kharṣ*)—according to what Rāghib says—means to claim something on the basis of conjecture

or guesswork. But it has also been interpreted to mean "to lie."

أَمْ آتَيْنَاهُمْ كِتَابًا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ فَهُمْ بِهِ مُسْتَمْسِكُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(43:21) ***Did We give them a Book before this, so that they are holding fast to it?***

Before this means before the Qur'an. And this verse negates the possibility of their actions having any scriptural basis, just as the verse immediately before this negates the possibility of their actions having any rational basis. In short, the two verses say that they have no basis for worshipping the angels, whether from reason or revelation. Therefore God does not permit them to do so.

بَلْ قَالُوا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ مُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(43:22) ***Rather they say, "We found our fathers following a creed, and we are indeed guided in their footsteps."***

A "creed" (*ummah*) means a path that one follows and is led by, in other words a "religion" (*dīn*). God says "rather" (*bal*) to signify that this is in contrast to the above two verses. In other words, they have no evidence for the authenticity of their worship, so instead they say they found their fathers following a religion and they are guided in their footsteps. In other words, they are doing nothing more than clinging to blindly following their fathers.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ مَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ مُقْتَدُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(43:23) ***And so it has been that We did not send any warner to a town before you, without its affluent ones saying, "We found our fathers following a creed and we are indeed following in their footsteps."***

This means that their adherence to blindly following their forefathers is not something unique to them. In fact, this was the habit of their ancestors amongst idolatrous nations. We did not send any warner, meaning a prophet, to a town before you except that the affluent amongst them held fast to blindly following their forefathers. They said: "We found our

ancestors upon a religion and we are guided in their footsteps. We will not forsake it nor contravene them."

The fact that this statement is attributed to the wealthy amongst them shows that it is their wealth and affluence that motivates them to blindly follow their forefathers and prevents them from considering the truth.

قَالَ أَوَلَوْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِأَهْدَىٰ مِمَّا وَجَدْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(43:24) ***He would say, "What! Even if I bring you a better guidance than what you found your fathers following?!" They would say, "We indeed disbelieve in what you are sent with."***

The one speaking is the warner from the previous verse. He is addressing the affluent ones, but this includes others as well. And the conjunction *even if I…* is connected to what they said above. So this means: "You will follow in your forefathers' footsteps even if I brought you a better guidance than what you found them following?" In other words, "Will you cling to your religion even if I brought you a better one?" And the speaker says the religion he brings them "a better guidance" not because their religion contains any guidance at all (as it is false), but merely for the sake of argument.

Their response to the warner's question is: *We indeed disbelieve in what you are sent with.* But this is an arbitrary rejection that does not offer any argument.

فَانْتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ ۖ فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(43:25) ***Thereupon We took vengeance on them; so observe how was the fate of the deniers.***

Meaning: After having sent a warner to challenge them for blindly following their forefathers and their rejecting him, we destroyed them because of their denial. So look what became of the people of those towns who came before you. And this is a warning directed towards the Prophet's own people.

Verses 26-45

In the previous verses, the discourse reached the point where the idolaters reject the Prophet without any valid reason and cling to the practice of idolatry in blind imitation of their forefathers without any evidence. It follows this by turning to the story of Abraham. In it, we see that Abraham rejected precisely this kind of blind imitation, which was practiced by his father and his people. He disassociated himself from what they worshipped besides God and tried to lead them to the guidance of his Lord who originated everything.

Thereafter, it describes how God provided the Prophet's own people with blessings and their ingratitude by rejecting God's Book and falsely imputing it and the Messenger who brought it. Then it mentions the consequences of turning away from God's remembrance; things which ultimately lead to misery and loss. God then tells the Prophet that he cannot make them to believe if they do not want to, before threatening them with punishment. Finally, he tells the Prophet to hold fast to the Qur'an and says that it is a reminder for him and his people about which they will be questioned, and that it contains the religion of true Divine Unity which is the same religion as was followed by the Prophets who came before him.

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ إِنَّنِي بَرَاءٌ مِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(43:26) ***When Abraham said to his father and his people, "I repudiate what you worship…."***

Here, God uses the verbal noun (*barāʾun*) for *repudiate* rather than the active participle (*barīʾun*), so the literal meaning is "I am a repudiation of what you worship." He uses this for hyperbole, just as when we say "Zayd is fairness" to mean that Zayd is a fair person.

The verse shows that Abraham repudiated everything that his father and his people would worship besides God, whether idols or heavenly bodies. Based on the accounts contained in other *sūrah*s of the Qur'an, such as al-Anʿām, al-Anbiyāʾ and al-Shuʿarāʾ, this was after he had challenged his people's idolatry and they had invoked the practice of their forefathers.

In context, the verse means: "And tell your people [O Muḥammad!]

about when Abraham repudiated the gods of his father and his people that they worshipped in blind imitation of their forefathers without any evidence, and he alone reflected on truth."

إِلَّا الَّذِى فَطَرَنِى فَإِنَّهُۥ سَيَهْدِينِ ﴿٢٧﴾

(43:27) *"…excepting Him who originated me; indeed He will guide me."*

In other words, "except for the one who brought me into existence, and that is God." The ascription of origination (*fiṭr*) to God alludes to the proof of His lordship and divinity, as the act of bringing things into being is inseparable from looking after the affairs of those originated beings. Therefore, the One who originated everything must also be the Lord who manages everything, and therefore He alone is worthy of worship.

…indeed He will guide me: Meaning: "He will guide me to the truth which I seek." It is also said that this means: "…to the path to Paradise."

And this sentence highlights another special quality of lordship, namely guiding people to the true path which they must follow. This is because leading people towards perfection is the fulfilment of managing their affairs, so the Lord who manages everything must guide everything towards its ultimate purpose and felicity. God says: *Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it* (20:50). And He says: *With God rests guidance to the straight path* (16:9). So turning towards God through Divine Unity in worship entails Divine Guidance as a consequence, as God says: *As for those who strive for Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways* (29:69).

The exception in *excepting Him who originated me* is a disjunctive exception, as the idolaters do not really worship God, as we have already seen. Some commentators have said it is a conjunctive exception and that the idolaters would say "God is our Lord" even though they only worshipped idols, as you have seen.

وَجَعَلَهَا كَلِمَةًۢ بَاقِيَةً فِى عَقِبِهِۦ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(43:28) ***And He made it a lasting word among his posterity so that they may come back.***

It appears that the doer of the verb *He made…* is God, and its object—based on what has been said—is the statement of repudiation uttered by

Abraham, which has the same meaning as the Profession of Divine Unity (*kalimat al-tawḥīd*) in the *shahādah*, as the words "There is no god but God" negate all gods besides God, rather than negating all Gods and then affirming God. This is apparent from the verse itself, so there is no need for the torturous interpretations some commentators have offered to the effect that the *it* which is the object of the verb refers to the Profession of Divine Unity, which is already known from Abraham's statement.

The meaning of his "posterity" (*ʿaqib*) are his descendants. The phrase *so that they may come back* means: So that they may come back from worshipping deities besides God and worship Him alone. In other words, so that some of them—those who worship other gods—may return to worship God through the invitation of others—those who worship Him alone. From this it appears that the meaning of *a lasting word amongst his posterity* means that there would always be monotheists amongst his descendants. Perhaps this is in response to Abraham's supplication, when he entreated God: *My Lord! Make this city a sanctuary, and save me and my children from worshiping idols.* (14:35).

It is said that the doer of the verb …*He made…* is Abraham, as he made this word lasting amongst his descendants in the hope that they would return to it. In this case, making it a lasting word amongst them means enjoining them to adhere to it, as God recounts: *Abraham enjoined this [creed] upon his children, and [so did] Jacob, [saying], "My children! God has indeed chosen this religion for you; so never die except as muslims."* (2:132)

However, you will already be well aware that enjoining (*waṣiyyah*) his children to adhere to the Profession of Divine Unity cannot be called making it a lasting word amongst his posterity. Even if you can say that is basically what God means here, it is not the same as *making* it so.

It is also said that this means that God made the Imamate a lasting word amongst Abraham's descendants, and we shall discuss this in our discussion of the narrations below, God-willing.

So the apparent meaning of the verse is that this word shall endure amongst Abraham's descendants until the Day of Resurrection.

بَلْ مَتَّعْتُ هَٰؤُلَاءِ وَآبَاءَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ جَاءَهُمُ الْحَقُّ وَرَسُولٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

(43:29) ***Rather I provided for these and their fathers until there came to them the truth and a manifest Messenger.***

Rather contrary to what the previous verse suggested, they have not turned away from idolatry to the path of Divine Unity, as was hoped. So instead, I have provided for those of your people and their forefathers and they enjoyed my blessings *until there came to them the truth and a manifest Messenger.*

Perhaps the reason why God changes to speaking in the first-person singular ("I") here is to stress the magnitude of their offence, and to show that their ingratitude, disbelief, and accusations of sorcery are—in reality—directed against none other than God Himself.

Here, *the truth* refers to the Qur'an and the *manifest Messenger* is Muḥammad.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمُ الْحَقُّ قَالُوا هَٰذَا سِحْرٌ وَإِنَّا بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(43:30) ***But when the truth came to them, they said, "This is magic, and we indeed disbelieve in it."***

This is their imputing the truth that came to them in the form of the Qur'an, which necessarily entails their imputing the character of the Messenger who brought it. And the same applies to their statement below: *Why was not this Qur'an sent down….*

وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنُ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ مِنَ الْقَرْيَتَيْنِ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٣١﴾

(43:31) ***And they said, "Why was not this Qur'an sent down to some great man from the two cities?"***

By *the two cities* (qaryatayn), they mean Mecca and Ṭā'if. And by *great*—based on the context—they mean someone with wealth and status which are considered the marks of nobility and rank amongst the children of this world. And of course, when they say *some great man from the two cities*, they mean a great man from *either* of the two cities. And "either" is omitted for the sake of brevity.

By this they mean that the position of divine messengership is a position of great nobility which should only belong to a person of noble stature and authority amongst his people. In their eyes, the Prophet was an upstart without wealth or status. In other words, if the Qur'an was a revelation sent down by God, then why did it not come down to a great man from Mecca or Ṭā'if who enjoyed wealth and status?

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> By "a great man from either of the two cities", they were referring to al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah from Mecca and Abū Masʿūd ʿUrwa b. Masʿūd al-Thaqafī from Ṭāʾif." This is narrated from Qatādah. It is said: "They meant ʿUtba b. Abī Rabīʿah from Mecca and Ibn ʿAbd Yālīl from Ṭāʾif." This is according to Mujāhid. And it is said: "They meant al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah from Mecca and Ḥabīb b. ʿUmar al-Thaqafī from Ṭāʾif." This is from Ibn ʿAbbās.

The truth is that all of these opinions are commentators applying the verse to various candidates. But the apparent meaning of the verse is that they spoke in generalities, but they had one of these grandees from either of the two cities in mind when they did.

أَهُمْ يَقْسِمُونَ رَحْمَتَ رَبِّكَ ۚ نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَعِيشَتَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۚ وَرَفَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِيَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا سُخْرِيًّا ۗ وَرَحْمَتُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ مِمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

> (43:32) ***Is it they who dispense the mercy of your Lord? It is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life and raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service, and your Lord's mercy is better than what they amass.***

Looking at the context, *mercy* (*raḥmah*) refers to prophethood (*nubuwwah*).

Livelihood (maʿīshah) is derived from the Arabic word for "life" (*ʿaysh*). According to Rāghib, *ʿaysh* means specifically the animal sense of living. This is a more particularized meaning than *ḥayāt*, which also means "life", as this kind of life can be ascribed to animals, angels and even God. "Livelihood" (*maʿīshah*) refers to the means by which one goes on living.

He also says that *taskhīr* means to drive someone towards a particular goal by force, and *sakhrī* means one who is forced thus and becomes disposed to His will.

This verse and the two that immediately follow should be read as responses to the idolaters saying *Why was not this Qur'an sent down to some great man from the two cities?* In short, the verses that this is an arbitrary judgement which should be a source of surprise, as how is it that these people make judgements about things that do not belong to

them? This livelihood that they depend upon in this worldly life is a mercy from Us, which we do not consider as having any value because it is just a temporary provision that we divide amongst them. And even this is their control and their will, so how can they apportion prophethood, which is an even greater blessing because it is the key to eternal human happiness and everlasting success, and give it to whomever they wish or deny it to whomever they wish?

Is it they who dispense the mercy of your Lord?: This is a rhetorical question that serves as a rebuke. There is a transition of address in *the mercy of your* [sing.] *Lord*, as God says this rather than "Our mercy" to signify that the Prophet alone has been selected through God's lordship for prophethood. In other words, this means: They do not own prophethood, which is a mercy that belongs only to God. So they have no right to deny it to you and give it to whomever they please!

It is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life: An explanation of the reason for the rebuke in the previous sentence; namely that they cannot even divide up those trivial things beneath prophethood, such as their livelihood in this world, so We divided it between them. So how can they possibly divide up something more important, whose value is immeasurable—i.e. prophethood, which is a mercy that belongs only to your Lord?

The proof that human livelihoods are not in peoples' hands is the difference between wealth and poverty, health and illness, numbers of children and any other form of sustenance; that things are used up without being replenished; and that no one can attain everything he desires. If this were in the hands of people, then no one would lack anything. In fact, no one person would differ from another. So the differences between people are the clearest evidence that sustenance is divided according to God's will rather than that of human beings.

The human will and human actions are just two incomplete causes (*asbāb nāqiṣah*) for attaining the desired outcome, namely sustenance (*rizq*). Moreover, beyond these are innumerable material causes that are beyond the control of human being, which must all be in alignment for him to attain his goal. And these causes are only in the hand of God, to whom all causes ultimately return.

This is with regards to money. As for status (*jāh*), this too is apportioned by God. It depends on specific traits that elevate the rank of the human being in society and enable him to render other people subservient

to his aims. These are traits such as cleverness, cunning, bravery, determination, ambition, abundant wealth, or a strong family; none of this can be attained except by God's doing. That is what God means when He says *and raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service*. So from this verse we understand that the one who distributes livelihood and status amongst people is none other than God.

…and your Lord's mercy is better than what they amass: In other words, prophethood is better than wealth, so how can they claim to control its distribution when they cannot even control the distribution of wealth amongst themselves?

And raised some of them above others in rank could also be read as explaining *it is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life*. This elucidates the distribution of livelihood amongst them by elucidating the reasons for its unequal distribution in human society as follows: Man's needs in his worldly existence are so many that he cannot possibly satisfy them all in isolation. This compels him to form a community with other individuals, seeking first and foremost to use them for his own ends, but secondly seeking mutual cooperation and support. We have discussed this at length in our study of prophethood.[1]

Ultimately, this leads to a barter economy through a primitive kind of specialization, in that everyone is given more than what they need for some of their desires, but not enough for others. What happens is that they take what they are lacking from others in exchange for what others need, so one person who has control over more water than he deeds will trade that water in return for another person's surplus of foodstuff. This means that each person will strive using whatever he alone has to acquire whatever he needs, which in turn means that each person needs other people for his provisions for life, making use of them and being of use to them. So a baker will need a water-bearer's product and vice versa, so they will cooperate through exchange; a worker is used for his labour by an employer, while an employer is used for his wealth by a labourer. In this way, each member of society is used by others because of what he has, and he uses them in the same way, whether directly or indirectly. And each individual is elevated above others by whatever he alone possesses to differing degrees, depending on the level of demand for it.

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1 See the discourse on prophethood in the section of the exegesis on 2:213 (Volume 3 of the English translation). [Trans.]

Based on the above reading, livelihood means whatever is needed for living, whether wealth and status, or just wealth, and whatever follows from that. This is supported by the verse's coda: *and your Lord's mercy is better than what they amass* as *what they amass* refers to wealth and whatever other necessities of living they amass as a consequence.

وَلَوْلَا أَنْ يَكُونَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً لَجَعَلْنَا لِمَنْ يَكْفُرُ بِالرَّحْمَٰنِ
لِبُيُوتِهِمْ سُقُفًا مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَمَعَارِجَ عَلَيْهَا يَظْهَرُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(43:33) ***Were it not that mankind would then be one community, We would have surely made for those who defy the All-beneficent silver roofs for their houses and flights by which they ascend,***

This verse and those following it explain that provisions of this world such as wealth and beauty hold no inherent value or worth in God's eyes.

Some commentators say that by mankind being one community, God means that they would all be alike in disbelieving in Him if they saw that all of the world's ornaments belonged to the faithless while the believer had nothing at all. *Flights* (maʿārij) means "staircases".

In this case, the meaning of this verse reads: Were it not that everyone would disbelieve together when they saw that the affluence of the faithless and the deprivation of the faithful, we would have given whoever disbelieves in the All-Merciful houses with silver roofs and flights of stairs upon which they could raise themselves above others.

Mankind being one community could also refer to everyone being equal when it came to the means of attaining a livelihood, without any distinction between the faithful and the faithless. In which case, if someone strives for sustenance and the means are ready for him, he will obtain it whether he believes in God or not. Equally, if someone strives but the means are not ready for him, he will be deprived of it whether he believes in God or not.

In which case, this means: "Were it not for the fact that We wanted people to be equal with regards to the means by which they could win the ornaments of this world, irrespective of whether they believed or not, then We would have surely made for those who defy…" etc.

وَلِبُيُوتِهِمْ أَبْوَابًا وَسُرُرًا عَلَيْهَا يَتَّكِئُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾ وَزُخْرُفًا ۚ وَإِنْ كُلُّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمَّا
مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۚ وَالْآخِرَةُ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(43:34–35) ***and doors for their houses and couches on which they recline; and ornaments; yet*** **(inna)** ***all of that is but*** **(lammā)** ***the wares of the life of this world, and the Hereafter near your Lord is for the Godwary.***

Doors and *couches* are left indefinite for aggrandizement.

Ornaments means either gold or adornments in general. In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> *Ornaments* (zukhruf) means the perfection of a thing's beauty, and it is used for gold because of this meaning. A thing is also "ornamented" if it is made pleasant or adorned with decoration, and the word is used to refer to engravings and illustrations because of this meaning. In a tradition, we read that the Prophet did not enter the Kaʿbah [after the conquest of Mecca] before he called for all the ornaments to be removed, then [after they were removed] he went towards the door.

The rest should be clear.

…yet **(inna)** ***all of that is but*** **(lammā)** ***the wares of the life of this world, and the Hereafter near your Lord is for the Godwary:*** *Yet…* is for negation and *…but…* here is for an exception. In other words: Whatever trinkets have been mentioned above are naught but the ephemeral and fleeting wares of the life of this world—they shall not last.

…and the Hereafter near your Lord is for the Godwary—because *the Hereafter* is mentioned in the context of *life* (ḥayāt), it can only refer to a felicitous Hereafter, insofar as the life of a wretched Hereafter is not considered life at all.

This means: The felicitous afterlife is reserved for the Godwary (*muttaqīn*) by God's command and decree. This specification to some extent supports the interpretation we mentioned above about mankind becoming a single community in this world.

وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ لَهُ قَرِينٌ ﴿٣٦﴾

(43:36) ***Whoever turns a blind eye*** **(yaʿshu)** ***to the remembrance of the All-beneficent, We assign him a devil who remains his companion.***

"To turn a blind eye" (*yaʿshu*) literally means for someone to feign blindness while there is nothing wrong with his sight. "To assign" means

to appoint or to bring one thing to another; "he assigned it to him" means he brought it to him.

Having mentioned the Godwary and said that the Hereafter near their Lord belongs to them, God contrasts this with the fate of those who are averse to the Truth and turn a blind eye to the remembrance of the All-beneficent. He begins by pointing to the beginning of their affair—their neglect of God's remembrance—before saying that this yields them to companion devils who will accompany them and misguide them until they reach the punishment of the Hereafter with them.

So *Whoever turns a blind eye to the remembrance of the All-beneficent, We assign him a devil…* means that whoever disregards the remembrance of the All-beneficent and gives it no attention, We bring a devil to him. God articulates this in another location in the Qur'an when He says: *Have you not regarded that We unleash the devils upon the faithless to urge them impetuously?* (19:83). God joins *remembrance* to *the All-beneficent* (al-raḥmān) in order to show that remembering God (*dhikr*) is a mercy (*raḥmah*).

…who remains his companion means he accompanies him everywhere and does not separate from him.

وَإِنَّهُمْ لَيَصُدُّونَهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(43:37) ***Indeed they bar them from the way while they suppose that they are guided.***

The first *they* in this verse refers to the devils, while the remainder of *them*/*they* refers to those who turn a blind eye to God's remembrance. God uses the plural here because it refers to the collective of *whoever turns a blind eye…* above. "To bar" means to divert, and *the way* (sabīl) here means the way which the remembrance of God calls people towards, namely the Religion of Divine Unity.

So this verse means: The devils divert those who turn a blind eye to God's remembrance from the right path, while the latter—those who turn a blind eye—think that they are guided towards the Truth themselves.

The fact that they think they are guided to the Truth while they are actually barred from its way is the result of them being assigned a companion devil and falling under Satan's sway (*wilāyat al-shayṭān*). The human being, by his basic nature, is innately inclined towards the Truth and recognizing it when it is put in front of him. However, if it is put in front of

him but he turns away because of his desires and keeps on this path, then God seals his heart, blinds his sight, and assigns him a companion devil. When this happens, he no longer sees the truth even if it stares him in the face. Instead, he thinks the truth he seeks only lies in the falsehood that Satan invites him towards. So he thinks he is guided while he is astray; he imagines he has found the truth, while all he has is falsehood.

This is the veil that God mentions being cast over them in this world but that shall be torn from them on the Day of Resurrection. God says: *Those whose eyes were blindfolded to My remembrance and who could not hear… Say, "Shall we inform you about the biggest losers in regard to works? Those whose endeavour goes awry in the life of the world, while they suppose they are doing good."* (18:101–104)

And one of the things that will be said to him on the Day of Resurrection, while his companion devil is still with him, is: *"You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today"… His companion will say, "Our Lord! I did not make him a rebel, but he was in extreme error"* (50:22–27).

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَنَا قَالَ يَا لَيْتَ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ بُعْدَ الْمَشْرِقَيْنِ فَبِئْسَ الْقَرِينُ ﴿٣٨﴾

(43:38) *Until when he comes to Us, he will say, "I wish there had been between me and you the distance between the east and west! What an evil companion [are you]!"*

Until… marks the end of the activity described in the previous verse: *…they bar them…* and *…while they suppose…* In other words, it means: "Their companion devils will continue leading them astray and they will keep thinking that they are guided, until one of them comes to Us."

Comes to Us refers to the Resurrection, and the doer (*he*) of the verbs *comes* and *says* goes back to *Whoever turns a blind eye…* because it refers to each individual person.

Here, God uses *mashriqayn* (lit. "the two easts") to mean *the east and west* and the word "east" is used refer to them both [to allow God to include both in a single dual word, as this is more succinct than *al-mashriq wa al-maghrib*].

This makes the meaning of the verse: They continue to be barred from God's way and turn a blind eye to His remembrance, thinking that they

are guided, until one of them comes to Us with his companion devil. Then his own error and the punishment that results will become clear to him. Whereat he will say to his companion devil, distressed by his company: "I wish there had been between me and you the distance between the east and the west, for you are a terrible companion!"

From the tone of the verse, we can discern that these people will be afflicted with the company of these companion devils as a punishment in addition to the punishment of Hell. This is why they wish to be far from them, and focus on them while neglecting all other punishments.

وَلَنْ يَنْفَعَكُمُ الْيَوْمَ إِذْ ظَلَمْتُمْ أَنَّكُمْ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُشْتَرِكُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(43:39) ***"Today it will be of no avail to you*** **[pl.]*, as you did wrong, that you will share in the punishment."***

It appears that this verse is joined to the description of their condition that precedes it. *Today*, of course, refers to the Day of Judgement, and when God says *that you will share in the punishment*, this is the subject of the verb *it will be of no avail to you*.[1] God uses the plural form of address (*kum*) to include all of those who turned a blind eye to remembrance and their companion devils together. *As you did wrong…* takes a position of explaining the reason for this.

This means—and God knows best—that because some of you corrupted others and put them to trial in this world, perhaps you are consoled by the fact that perhaps they will suffer the same punishment as you; perhaps you think this will grant you some relief. However, the fact that your companion devils share your punishment will avail you nothing on the Day of Resurrection. And that is because their being with you in the punishment of Hell is itself another form of punishment!

Some commentators have also said that the subject of the verb *it will be of no avail to you* is the words *I wish there had been between me and you….* They say that *as you did wrong* means: "Because you wronged yourselves in this world by following these devils into faithlessness and sin." And *…that you will share in the punishment* explains why this wish will be of no avail. In other words, the verse says: "It does you no good to wish they were far away from you, because both you and your companion

1 In other words, "The fact you will share in the punishment will be of no avail to you…." [Trans.]

devils deserve to be punished."

However, there is a conflict here. This proposed reading takes *as you did wrong* as one explanation for why this wish will be of no avail before taking *that you will share in the punishment* as another. But the two do not match when read in this way; if this wish will not avail you because *you did wrong* then it only befits the ones who committed the sins to be punished, not that they should share the punishment with those whom they followed.

Other commentators have said it means that just because both parties share the punishment this will not in any way lighten or reduce it, because each of you and your companion devils will receive a complete share of the same punishment, not a single share divided between you.

However this does not match with the reasons mentioned for this being of no avail. Even though this idea might be true in itself, there is no indication of it in this verse or its wider context.

Others still have suggested that it means: Your being punished together will not avail you in the same way that it benefits two people to share worldly hardships because they can help one another in bearing its weight, and divide its worry between themselves. This is because both you and your companion will be given a punishment beyond your capacity to bear.

The same criticism as above applies to this reading. As does the fact that this notion of "availing" does not even come to their mind in this situation in order that God should expend words negating it.

أَفَأَنْتَ تُسْمِعُ الصُّمَّ أَوْ تَهْدِى الْعُمْىَ وَمَنْ كَانَ فِى ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

(43:40) ***Can you, then, make the deaf hear or guide the blind and someone who is in manifest error?***

So far, God has mentioned that He assigns companion devils to these people and inverts their perceptions to the extent that they see error as guidance and become incapable of knowing the truth. From this, he moves logically to tell His Prophet that these people are deaf and blind and that he does not have the power to make them hear the words of truth or guide them to the right path. Therefore, he should not strain himself to invite them to the truth, nor grieve when they turn away. So this is asked as a rhetorical question. The rest is clear.

فَإِمَّا نَذْهَبَنَّ بِكَ فَإِنَّا مِنْهُمْ مُنْتَقِمُونَ ﴿٤١﴾ أَوْ نُرِيَنَّكَ الَّذِى وَعَدْنَاهُمْ فَإِنَّا

عَلَيْهِمْ مُقْتَدِرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(43:41–42) ***Either We shall take you away—for We will indeed take vengeance on them—or We shall show you what We have promised them, for indeed We have power over them.***

To take the Prophet away means to cause him to pass away before taking vengeance on them. It is also said: It means to remove him from amongst them.

For We will indeed take vengeance on them means "we will do this without doubt."

Showing the Prophet what He has promised them means to take vengeance on them before the Prophet passes away or while he is still amongst them.

We have power over them means Our power looms above them.

At the opening of the verse *either We shall take you away…*, the verb (*nadhhabanna*) has the *nūn* of emphasis (*nūn al-taʾkīd* appended to it). And the meaning of the verse is: "We shall exact vengeance on them whether after you pass away or before it without doubt."

فَاسْتَمْسِكْ بِالَّذِي أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ ۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٤٣﴾

(43:43) ***So hold fast to what has been revealed to you. Indeed you are on a straight path.***

This appears to follow logically from everything that has been said above, beginning with the fact that the reminder has been sent down through revelation and prophethood in accordance with the Divine Custom; that the Book He revealed to his Prophet is true; that He is a manifest messenger whose preaching will only be answered by those who are Godwary; that the only ones who turn away from him will be those who keep company with devils; and that he has nothing to gain from their belief or disbelief, but that God will surely exact vengeance upon them.

All of this affirms the importance of holding fast to the Book which has been revealed to him, for he is upon a straight path.

وَإِنَّهُ لَذِكْرٌ لَكَ وَلِقَوْمِكَ ۖ وَسَوْفَ تُسْأَلُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(43:44) ***Indeed it is a remembrance for you and for your people, and soon you will be questioned.***

It appears that the remembrance here refers to God's remembrance, and this is a theme that recurs throughout the *sūrah*. *For you and for your people* is for specification (*ikhtiṣāṣ*) with the meaning that the duties it contains are directed towards them. This is in part supported by the coda … *and soon you* [pl.] *will be questioned*, meaning on the Day of Resurrection.

Most commentators say that the meaning of remembrance (*dhikr*) here is the honour that comes with being remembered. So the meaning becomes: It is indeed a great honour for you and for your people amongst the Arabs to be remembered by this amongst all nations.

وَاسْأَلْ مَنْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رُسُلِنَا أَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ دُونِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ آلِهَةً يُعْبَدُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(43:45) ***Ask those of Our Messengers We have sent before you: Did We set up any gods besides the All-beneficent to be worshipped?***

It is said: By asking the Messengers here, God means to ask their communities and the scholars of their religion, as when God says: *So if you are in doubt about what We have sent down to you, ask those who read the Book before you* (10:94). The implication of this is obviously that what is being asked of them is exactly what their Messengers brought, not whatever they bring from their own selves.

It is said: This means to ask the People of the Two Books—the Torah and the Evangel—for even if they disbelieve, the argument is supported by their unanimous agreement. This is addressed to the Prophet [because the command is singular], but the duty [to ask] is for his community.

However, the implausibility of both interpretations is not hard to see. The second is even more unlikely for restricting this to the People of the Book without any specification being apparent in the verse.

It is said: The verse is one of the things the Prophet was told during the Night Ascension, namely that he should ask the spirits of the Prophets when he gathers with them whether they brought any religion besides the Religion of Divine Unity.

And more than one narration has come down with this interpretation from the Imams of the Prophet's Household, and we shall present them to you in the study of narrations below, God-willing.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, about God's saying *And He made it a lasting word among his posterity* (43:28), it is related [from Imām al-Ṣādiq]:

The *lasting word amongst his posterity* refers to the Imamate until the Day of Recompense—from Abū ᶜAbd Allāh.

Author's comments: There are other narrations to this effect and in some it is used allegorically to demonstrate that the Imamate continues in the line of Ḥusayn.

A study of the narrations shows that this reading rests on the assumption that the pronoun *it* in *He made it* refers to the guidance mentioned in His saying *He will guide me* (43:27). As we have already seen in the interpretation of the verse *I am making you the Imam of mankind* (2:124), one of the duties of the Imam is to guide mankind in the domain of their actions in the sense of driving them towards God through their guidance, as well as leading them to the highest degrees of proximity to God and showing each person his proper place based on his behaviour. For while the true guidance lies with God, it is attributed to the Imam in a secondary or accidental[1] sense.

So the actuality of guidance (*hidāyah*), which descends from God to mankind, first encompasses him and then overflows from him to other creatures. He has complete guidance, and everyone else has a level beneath this. So what Abraham refers to in the verse *He will guide me* is only pure guidance (*hidāyah muṭlaqah*) which applies to the most complete level of guidance which is the sole preserve of the Imam, hence this guidance is the Imamate, which God has made a lasting word amongst his posterity.

(2) In *al-Iḥtijāj*, from al-ᶜAskarī, it is related from his father [Imam al-Hādī]:

God's Messenger was sitting in the courtyard of the Kaᶜbah one day, when ᶜAbd Allāh b. Umayyah al-Makhzūmī said to him: "Had God wanted to send a messenger to us, He would have chosen the most magnificent of us in wealth, and the best of us in condition. Would He not send this Qur'an—which you claim God sends to you and which He charges you to deliver as His messenger—to

1 "Accidental" (*bi al-ᶜaraḍ*) here means the philosophical notion of "accidental", namely something that does not devolve from the essence of a thing. This should not be confused with the everyday usage of "accidental", which implies something happening haphazardly or owing to a lack of care. [Trans.]

a great man from the two cities? Either al-Walīd b. Mughīrah in Mecca, or ʿUrwah b. Masʿūd al-Thaqafī in Ṭāʾif!"
Then he quoted a lengthy response from God's Messenger to the effect of what is said in the verses, and said:
That is God's saying: *And they said, "Why was not this Qur'an sent down to some great man from the two cities?" Is it they who dispense the mercy of your Lord?*—O Muḥammad!—*It is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life*. So He made some of us need others; he made this person need that person's wealth, and he made that person need this person's commodity, and that person this person's labour. You see, even the most splendid kings and fabulously wealthy of men have need of the poorest of the poor in some way; either some commodity he has that they do not; some work he is suitable for that the king cannot do for himself; or some knowledge or wisdom this poor person has that the king can learn from him. So the poor person needs the rich king's money, and the king needs this poor person's knowledge, learning, or opinion.
In this situation, the king cannot say: "Why was I not given my wealth with that beggar's knowledge?" Nor can the poor person say: "Why was I not given my learning and knowledge, and whatever talents I have, with the wealth of that rich king?" Then God says: *and [We] raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service*—O Muḥammad!—*and your Lord's mercy is better than what they amass.* Meaning the wealth of the world that those people amass.

(3) In *al-Kāfī*, in a chain of narration going to Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib: I asked ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn [Imām al-Sajjād] about God's saying: *Were it not that mankind would then be one community*….
He responded: "By that he means the community of Muḥammad, to all follow a single religion and be disbelievers. *We would have surely made for those who defy the All-beneficent*…."

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, in a chain of narration from Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:
Either We shall take you away…—O Muḥammad! From Mecca to Medina. We will either drive you there, and We will take revenge from them with ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Ḥamīd, Ibn Jarīr, and al-Ḥākim relate, and al-Ḥākim authenticates, a tradition from

Qatādah about the verse *Either We shall take you away—for We will indeed take vengeance on them…* :

Anas said: "God's Messenger left but the calamity remained. God did not show His Prophet anything he disliked in his community until He took his soul. There was no prophet before him save that they saw punishment befall their community. Instead, your Prophet saw what would become of his community after him, and from then on he was not seen laughing or joyous until his soul was taken."

Author's comments: A tradition to the same effect is narrated from him, as well as from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and others, through different routes of narration.

(6) On this topic, Ibn Mardawayh relates by way of Muḥammad b. Marwān al-Kalbī from Abū Ṣāliḥ, from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh, from the Prophet, concerning the verse *Either We shall take you away—for We will indeed take vengeance on them…*:

This was revealed about ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, that he will take vengeance on the pledge-breakers and wrong doers after me.

Author's comments: The apparent meaning of this narration, the one before it, and others with a similar meaning is that the threat in these two verses is directed to those Muslims (*ahl al-qiblah*) who deviate from the Truth rather than the disbelievers of the Quraysh.

(7) And in *al-Iḥtijāj*, in a lengthy tradition from the Commander of the Faithful [Imām ʿAlī], we read:

As for God's saying: *Ask those of Our Messengers We have sent before you…* (43:45), this is one of the proofs which God gave our Prophet, and thereby provided a conclusive argument for all His creatures. This is because, as God made him the seal of the Prophets and made him a messenger to all nations and all creeds, God chose him to ascend to the heavens on the Night Ascension (*miʿrāj*). On that night, He gathered all the Prophets for him so that he could know the message each of them had been sent with, and what commandments, signs and proofs they bore from God….

Author's comments: Al-Qummī narrates a tradition to this effect in his *Tafsīr* with a chain of narrators from Abū al-Rabīʿ from Abū Jaʿfar in response to a question posed by Nāfiʿ b. Azraq. It is also narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* with a chain from Saʿīd b. Jubayr, Ibn Jarīḥ, and Ibn Zayd.

Verses 46–56

So far, God has described people's insolence in spite of the blessings He has bestowed upon them, how they imputed the truth brought to them by a manifest messenger, dismissed it as magic, and said: *Why was not this Qur'an sent down to some great man from the two cities?* (43:31) In other words, they gave preference to other men over the Prophet because of their vast wealth. Here, God draws for these people the parable of Moses and Pharaoh, in that God sent Moses to Pharaoh and his clan with wondrous signs, but they mocked and laughed at them. And when Pharaoh addressed his people, he argued that he was better than Moses because he was the ruler of Egypt, and rivers ran at his feet. In this way, he duped them into obeying him until their arrogance became so great that God took revenge on them and drowned them.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ فَقَالَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(43:46) ***Certainly We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his elite. He said, "I am indeed a Messenger of the Lord of all the worlds."***

The *lām* in "certainly" (*laqad*) signifies an oath (*qasam*), and the *bāʾ* in *with Our signs* (bi ayātinā) signifies accompaniment (*muṣāḥabah*). The rest is clear.

فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا إِذَا هُمْ مِنْهَا يَضْحَكُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(43:47) ***But when he brought them Our signs, behold, they laughed at them.***

He brought them Our signs means to perform miracles to prove his claim of being a divine messenger. Their laughter means that they derided and disparaged the signs.

وَمَا نُرِيهِمْ مِنْ آيَةٍ إِلَّا هِيَ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أُخْتِهَا ۖ وَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ بِالْعَذَابِ لَعَلَّهُمْ

يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(43:48) ***And We did not show them a sign but it was greater than its sister and We seized them with punishment so that they might come back.***

Its sister means "its like." The phrase *but it was greater than its sister* refers to the fact that each sign proved irrefutably that Moses was truly a messenger.

The whole sentence of *And We did not show them…* is a circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*) for *them* at the end of the previous verse: *…laughed at them.*

This renders the meaning: "When he brought them miracles, they laughed at them. Even though each and every one of them was utterly irrefutable and clearly demonstrated the truth of his claims, without any deficiency or shortcoming."

…and We seized them with punishment so that they might come back: In other words, We punished them that they might give up their arrogance and accept his message. Here, *punishment* means the plagues (*ayāt al-rijz*) that were sent down upon them, such as drought, crop failures, floods, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood—each one a distinct sign (as described in Sūrat al-Aʿrāf).[1]

وَقَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَ السَّاحِرُ ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ بِمَا عَهِدَ عِنْدَكَ إِنَّنَا لَمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(43:49) ***They would say, "O magician! Invoke your Lord for us by the covenant He has made with you. We will indeed be guided."***

The *covenant* they refer to is the promise to relieve them of punishment if they believe according to some commentators, or to respond to his preaching when he calls on them according to others.

When they say *O magician!* this is a derisive and arrogant manner of addressing Moses. And when they say *invoke <u>your</u> Lord* instead of saying "invoke <u>our</u> Lord" or "invoke God", this too is because of their arrogance. This shows that they only asked him to supplicate to remove the punishment from them and promised to be guided in return.

It is said: *Magician* (sāḥir) was just a term for "scholar" (ʿ*ālim*) in their language and a magician enjoyed high standing in Egyptian society, so

1 See 7:133. [Trans.]

this is not a term of disrespect.

But here this is not the case; they were mocking Moses out of arrogance, as demonstrated by their saying: *invoke <u>your</u> Lord*.

فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابَ إِذَا هُمْ يَنْكُثُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(43:50) ***But when We lifted the punishment from them, behold, they would infringe.***

Infringe (*nakth*) means to go against a pledge or break a promise. In this case, they had promised *We will indeed be guided.*

وَنَادَىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ فِي قَوْمِهِ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكُ مِصْرَ وَهَٰذِهِ الْأَنْهَارُ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِي ۖ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

(43:51) ***And Pharaoh proclaimed amongst his people. He said, "O my people! Does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me and these rivers that run at my feet? Do you not perceive?"***

Meaning he called out to them while he stood amongst them. *He said* is used as a divider because it reads as though it is the answer to a question left implicit, as if someone were to ask: "And what did he say?" To which the answer is given: "He said such-and-such."

And these rivers that run at my feet… means from beneath his palace or from the gardens in which his towering palace stood. The phrase *and these rivers…*is either a circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*)[1] or is connected to *the kingdom of Egypt*.[2] The phrase *…that run at my feet* is a circumstantial qualifier for *rivers*, and *rivers* refers to the rivers of the Nile.

Do you not perceive? serves to recall the question he just asked, *Does not the kingdom of Egypt…?*

أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْ هَٰذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مَهِينٌ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ ﴿٥٢﴾

(43:52) ***Or am I better than this humble one who cannot even speak clearly?***

---

1 In which case, it should be rendered "…while these rivers run at my feet…." [Trans.]

2 This would make the meaning: "…and do not these rivers that run at my feet belong to me also?" [Trans.]

A *humble one* (mahīn) means one who is weak and lowly, and Pharaoh refers to Moses with this term because of his apparent poverty and shabbiness.

Who cannot even speak clearly means that he cannot say what he means. Perhaps he describes Moses like this with regards to the latter's condition before he was made a divine messenger, but God removed this defect from him, as is stated in the verse: *He said, "Moses, your request has been granted"* (20:36), after Moses asked: "*Remove the hitch from my tongue, that they may understand my speech*" (20:27–28).

When he says *Or am I not…*, the particle *or* (am) is either discontinuous, in which case it affirms his previous statement and makes the meaning: "Rather I am better than Moses because…"; or the particle could be continuous, in which case the alternate proposition is left implicit, making the meaning: "Am I not better than Moses…?" In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read that Sībuwayh and al-Khalīl argue that *or…* is connected to the coda of the previous verse *Do you not perceive…?* so *I am better* actually means "Or do you perceive?" As if to say: "Do you not perceive, or do you?" So that if they say "Yes, you are better" then, according to him, they are people of insight. In other words, when God says *Or am I better…?* in place of "Or do you perceive…?", He is putting the consequent in place of its cause,[1] or you could say vice versa as well.[2]

In any case, Pharaoh refers to Moses without using his name to belittle him. It is for the same reason that he describes him as *this humble one who cannot even speak clearly*, and to show that Moses cannot be better than he.

فَلَوْلَا أُلْقِيَ عَلَيْهِ أَسْوِرَةٌ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ أَوْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ مُقْتَرِنِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(43:53) ***Why have no bracelets of gold been cast upon him, nor have the angels come with him as escorts?***

In this verse, the word used for *bracelets* is *aswirah*, the plural of *siwār*. Al-Rāghib says that this is the Arabicized form of the Persian *dastwārah*.

Commentators have said that it was their habit that, when they made a man their leader, they would present him with a golden bracelet and

1 Meaning that if they are people with insight (cause), they will see he is better (consequent). [Trans.]

2 Meaning that if they see he is better (cause), then they must be people of insight (consequent). [Trans.]

place a golden necklace around his neck. So the verse means: "Were he really a messenger and a leader of men, he would have been given bracelets of gold!"

When Pharaoh says …*nor have the angels come with him as escorts*, the word used for 'escort' is *iqtirān* but it is used in the sense of *taqārun*, just as *istibāq* and *istiwāʾ* are used in the sense of *tasābuq* ("to race") and *tasāwī* ("to be equal").[1] So here *iqtirān* means that the angels should accompany him to confirm his prophethood. And this argument is often repeated by those who deny the Divine Messengers; for example, Quraysh are quoted as saying: *Why has not an angel been sent down to him so as to be a warner along with him?* (25:7)

فَاسْتَخَفَّ قَوْمَهُ فَأَطَاعُوهُ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

(43:54) ***So he carried away his people and they obeyed him. Indeed they were a transgressing lot.***

In other words, he carried away their intellects and their good sense. The remainder is clear.

فَلَمَّا آسَفُونَا انْتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(43:55) ***So when they roused Our wrath, We took vengeance on them and drowned them all.***

"To rouse someone's wrath" means to anger them. In other words: "When they angered us through their profligacy, we took revenge on them and drowned them all." And when we speak of God's anger, this means His desire to punish.

فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ سَلَفًا وَمَثَلًا لِلْآخِرِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(43:56) ***Thus We made them the vanguard and an example for posterity.***

1 This is because the verb *iqitrān* follows Form VIII of Arabic conjugation patterns (*bāb al-iftiʿāl*), which conveys a sense of effort, meaning "to do X with effort," but here the intended meaning is closer to Form VI (*bāb al-tafāʿul*) which conveys a sense of reciprocity, namely "to do X with someone." Ṭabāṭabāʾī cites other examples of words derived from verb form VIII with the meaning of verb form VI to support this.

A "vanguard" (*salaf*) means those who go in front. This appears to mean that they shall be the vanguard for others, namely they shall go in front of them in entering hell. An "example" (*mathal*) means a well-known proverb that people follow and give credence to. This appears to mean that they serve as a lesson to others who reflect and take a moral from their tale.

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Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the words *who cannot even speak clearly* (43:52), we read:
Meaning he cannot express himself.

(2) In *Tawḥīd*, through a chain of narrations going to Aḥmad b. Abī ʿAbd Allāh who narrates *marfūʿ*[1] from Abū ʿAbd Allāh about the verse *So when they roused Our wrath, We took vengeance on them…* (43:55):
God does not become angry as we do. Rather he has created friends of his own (*awliyāʾ li-nafsih*) who become angry or satisfied, and these [friends] are creatures whose affairs are under his control. He made their satisfaction His satisfaction and their anger His anger, and that is because He made them callers to Him and guides towards Him. That is how they received this status.
That does not apply to God as it applies His creatures. Rather this is the sense of what He has said. He has also said that whoever belittles My *walī* has declared war on Me and challenged Me to fight. And He says: *Whoever obeys the Messenger certainly obeys God…* (4:80), and *Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to God* (48:10). All of this and the like thereof is as we have said to you. Thusly is satisfaction, anger, and other such things [in relation to God].
And if anger and vexation reached the Maker—while He is the One who created them and brought them forth—then it would be possible for someone to say: the Maker will disappear one day. This is because if He is subject to anger and vexation, then He is subject to change, and if He is subject to change, there is nothing to prevent Him from disappearing. If this is the case, then the Maker cannot be distinguished from what He has made, the

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1 A *marfūʿ* narration is one where the names of one or more narrators have been omitted from the chain.

Almighty from what He has power over, or the Creator from what he created. Greatly exalted is God above this allegation!

He is the Creator of all things without need. If He has no need, then it is impossible for any limit (*ḥadd*) or quality (*kayf*) to inhere in Him. So comprehend this by God's will.

Author's comments: A similar tradition is narrated in *al-Kāfī*, by a chain of narrators going back to Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Bazīʿ, from his uncle, Ḥamza b. Bazīʿ, from the Imām.

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Verses 57–65

Having finished with the story of Moses, God turns now to that of Jesus. Preceding this are the Quraysh's arguments with the Prophet about him and God's response to them.

وَلَمَّا ضُرِبَ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ مَثَلًا إِذَا قَوْمُكَ مِنْهُ يَصِدُّونَ ﴿٥٧﴾ وَقَالُوا أَآلِهَتُنَا
خَيْرٌ أَمْ هُوَ ۚ مَا ضَرَبُوهُ لَكَ إِلَّا جَدَلًا ۚ بَلْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ خَصِمُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(43:57–58) ***When the Son of Mary was cited as an example, behold, your people raise an outcry. They say, "Are our gods better or he?" They only cite him to you for the sake of contention. Rather they are a contentious lot.***

The first four or six verses of this section revolve around the arguments of a group of people about citing Jesus as an example. Pondering on these verses, bearing in mind that this is a Meccan *sūrah* and ignoring the narrations about them, it appears that *when the Son of Mary was cited as an example…* refers to the verses revealed at the beginning of Sūrah Maryam, which is the only Meccan *sūrah* where the story of Jesus is presented in detail. The *sūrah* also relates the accounts of a number of the Prophets and recounts God's blessings upon them. It also concludes their accounts with the coda: *They are the ones whom God has blessed from among the Prophets…* (19:58). In the verses under discussion here, we also read *He was just a servant whom We had blessed* (43:59), which further suggests that the phrase *When the Son of Mary was cited as an example…* refers to the contents of Sūrah Maryam.

When God says *…behold, your people raise an outcry*, this means they howl and laugh. This censures the Quraysh for responding to a true example with jeers and derision. Instead of *raise an outcry* (yasiddūn), it can also be read *yasuddūn*, which means to turn away. And this is more appropriate for the following sentence.

They say, "Are our gods better or he?"—This is a rhetorical question. They mean to say that their gods are better than Jesus It is as though that when they heard his name mentioned and the nobility and blessings the

Qur'an ascribes to him, they ignored the Qur'an's description of him and took up the description of him common amongst the Christians, namely that he is a god and the son of God. Then, they used this to say, "Our gods are better than him!" And this is one of the most foolish arguments imaginable. It is as if they mean to say that whatever the Qur'an says about him is unimportant and whatever the Christians say is of no benefit because their gods are better than him.

"*They only cite him to you for the sake of contention*"—Meaning they only ask you *are our gods better or he?* to be contentious and refute the cited example, even if it happens to be true.

Rather they are a contentious lot—they are determined to quarrel with you no matter what.

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا عَبْدٌ أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَيْهِ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ مَثَلًا لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(43:59) ***He was just a servant whom We had blessed and made an exemplar for the Children of Israel.***

This refutes what was implied by their question *are our gods better or he?*, namely that he is the god of the Christians, as we shall discuss below.

Many commentators, including Zamakhsharī in his *Kashshāf*, relate an explanation about this verse attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās:

> When the Prophet recited to the Quraysh the verse: *Indeed you and what you worship besides God shall be fuel for hell, and you will come to it* (21:98), they were infuriated. Ibn al-Zabʿarī asked: "O Muḥammad! Do you mean only us and our gods, or do you mean all nations?"
>
> He said: "This is about you, your gods and all nations!"
>
> "Now I have you! By the Lord of the Kaʿbah! Do you not say that Jesus son of Mary is a prophet and praise him and his mother very highly? But you know well that the Christians worship the two of them. ʿUzayr is worshipped and the Angels are worshipped too. So if all of these people are going to hell, we are more than happy to join them with our gods!"
>
> Then they rejoiced and started laughing while the Prophet remained silent. Then the verse came down: *Indeed those to whom there has gone beforehand the best reward from Us will be kept away from it.* (21:101) as well as this verse.

In light of this tradition, the verse could be read as meaning when

Ibn al-Zabʿarī cited Jesus as an example and argued with God's Messenger about the Christians worshipping him, then *behold, your people raise an outcry* by calling out and laughing with joy at his argument and the fact he silenced the Prophet Then they said: "So are our gods better or he?" Meaning: "According to you, Jesus is better than our gods. So if he is going to be fuel for the fires of hell, then the matter of our gods is trivial." But *they only cite him to you for the sake of contention* and to win an argument, not in order to separate truth from falsehood.

We have already come across this tradition in our study of narrations concerning the verse *Indeed you and what you worship besides God shall be fuel for hell…* (21:98). There, we saw that, because of its various inconsistencies and weaknesses, it is considered unreliable (*ḍaʿīf*) and given no credence, to the extent that the traditionist, Ibn Ḥajar, says that this tradition is baseless and cannot be found in any Hadith collections, whether with a chain of narrators or without one. This story of Ibn al-Zabʿarī: even if it has been narrated through Shiʿa chains in a way that is safe from dispute, it does not mention the verse *When the Son of Mary was cited as an example…* being revealed at that point. Moreover, it does not appear that the verses *When the Son of Mary was cited as an example…* or *…are our gods better or he?* accord well with the explanation offered therein.

It is said: When they heard the verse *Indeed the case of Jesus with God is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be," and he was* (3:59), they said: "We are better guided than the Christians; they worship a person while we worship angels"—meaning the deities represented by their idols—"so our gods are better than their god!" In this case, the one who cited the example of Jesus son of Mary was God, and their saying *…are our gods better or he?* is to say that their gods are better than Jesus, not the other way round (as was mentioned in the above interpretation).

However, the problem with this reading is that the verse *Indeed the case of Jesus with God is like the case of Adam…* is Medinan, while the verses under discussion here (*When the Son of Mary was cited…*) are all Meccan and in a Meccan *sūrah*.

Moreover, this interpretation makes their saying *are our gods better or he?* about who is better between themselves and the Christians. In which case, the verse *He was just a servant whom We had blessed…* is left with no connection to the one before it!

It is said: When they heard the verse *Indeed the case of Jesus with God is like the case of Adam…*, they raised a commotion and said: "Muḥammad

just wants us to worship him like the Christians worship Jesus, and our gods are better than him!" Meaning better than the Prophet.

But this reading falls to the same criticism as the one before it.

It is said: Their saying *are our gods better or he?* is an attempt to vindicate themselves calling the angels God's daughters and worshipping, as if to say: That was not something we just made up, for the Christians worship the Messiah and say that he is His son, while he is but a person. On the other hand, we worship the angels and ascribe them to God, and they are better than people!

However, this does not explain the connection between the two verses: *When the Son of Mary was cited as an example, behold, your people raise an outcry* and *He was just a servant whom We had blessed*. If we accept this reading, then the latter verse has no bearing on what came before it, as we mentioned for the two other interpretations above.

It is said: Their saying *are our gods better or he?* means that our worshipping the gods is just like the Christians worshipping the Messiah, so which is better? Is it better to worship our gods or worship the Messiah? But whichever way he responds, whether worshipping the Messiah or worshipping their gods, he has agreed that a being other than God can be worshipped! And if he says that worshipping the Messiah is not better, then he has brought Jesus down from his proper station. So instead, he says that the Messiah is distinguished by the blessings and nobility God bestowed upon him, but this does not mean one can worship him.

However, even though there is no problem with this interpretation in of itself, but there is no indication of this level of detail in the question *are our gods better or he?*

Majmaᶜ al-Bayān quotes a number of interpretations for this verse. The fourth of these is what the leaders of the Prophet's Household have narrated from ᶜAlī:

> I came to God's Messenger one day and found him in a gathering of the Quraysh. He looked at me then said: "O ᶜAlī! Verily your similitude in this *ummah* is like that of Jesus son of Mary. One group of people loved him and went to extremes in loving him and perished. Another group of people hated him and went to extremes in hating him and perished. A third group remained moderate and were saved." This was too much for the Quraysh to bear, so they laughed and said: "They compare him to the prophets and messengers!" Then the verse was revealed.

Author's comments: This narration does not explain the significance

of their words *are our gods better or he?* but if this story was the reason for the verse's revelation, then their import is: "If we follow our gods and obey our leaders, this is better than taking ʿAlī as a guardian to rule over us" or "…this is better than following Muḥammad and having him put his cousin in charge of us!"

It is also possible that the sentence *They say, "Are our gods better or he?"* (43:58) marks the beginning of a new discussion, while the story explains the revelation of the previous verse, *When the Son of Mary was cited as an example*….

He was just a servant whom We had blessed and made an exemplar for the Children of Israel: The context suggests that *he* here refers to Jesus. His being an "exemplar" (*mathal*)—according to what has been said—means that he was an amazing sign of God (*āyah ʿajībah ilāhiyyah*) whose renown became like that of famous proverbs.

The meaning of the verse is: Jesus was no more than a servant who worshipped God openly, whom We blessed with prophethood, supported with the Holy Spirit, and caused wondrous miracles to appear by his hands. And We made him an amazing and miraculous sign to proclaim the truth to the Children of Israel.

As you can see, this refutes their question *are our gods better or he?* which showed that they thought their gods superior to the Messiah in divinity. The essence of this refutation is: Jesus was never a god for anyone to ponder his rank in divinity; rather, He was a servant whom God blessed. As for their gods, the Qur'an's view of them is evident.

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ مَلَائِكَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ يَخْلُفُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(43:60) ***Had We wished We would have made from you angels to be successors on the earth.***

It appears that this verse is connected to those that came before, and is set forth to dispel any scepticism that a human being could attain the level of perfection that the Qur'an ascribes to Jesus. After all, he created birds from clay, revived the dead, spoke to people from his cradle, and performed other such wonders. In this sense, he was like the angels who act as intermediaries in giving life, causing death, distributing sustenance and all the other forms divine management. But, even with all that, he was still a servant and not a lord, a worshipper and not an object of worship. However, the idolaters believed that such a level of perfection belonged

only to the angels and it was because of this that they worshipped them and considered them gods. In short, they thought it is impossible for any human to be endowed with powers they reserved for the angels.

God responds by saying that He has the power to cleanse and purify the human being from the contamination of sins, such that his heart becomes like that of the angels. This being would have the physical appearance of a man, but the heart of an angel. He would live on the earth, succeed one like him and be succeeded by one like him, and he would display the same abilities as the angels.[1]

On this basis, *from* in *from you* is used in the sense of partitioning (*tabʿīḍ*),[2] and *successors* mean they would succeed one another.

According to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, *from* in *from you* is used in the sense of substitution (*badal*),[3] as in the saying: "If only we had from the water of *zamzam*, a cool draught from mountain slopes."[4] Meanwhile, *successors* means that they would take the place of the Children of Adam upon the earth. This would make the meaning: "If we willed, we would have destroyed you and instead made angels to live and build upon the earth and worship God."

However, this reading of the verse does not accord with the structure of this section.

وَإِنَّهُ لَعِلْمٌ لِلسَّاعَةِ فَلَا تَمْتَرُنَّ بِهَا وَاتَّبِعُونِ ۚ هَٰذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٦١﴾

(43:61) ***Indeed he is knowledge of the Hour; so do not doubt it and follow Me. This is a straight path.***

The pronoun "he" at the beginning of the verse refers to Jesus. And *knowledge* (ʿilm) here means that by which something is known (*mā yuʿlam bih*). The meaning, then, reads: "Indeed by Jesus is known the Hour in that he was made without a father and he raised the dead. So from Jesus you can know that the Hour is indeed possible, so never doubt the Hour

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1 This is not an impossible transformation but actually a kind of existential growth (*takāmul wujūdī*) that entails a being moving from its lowest potential to its highest one. And this has been explained in its proper place.

2 That is, "We would have made some of you angels." [Trans.]

3 That is, "We would have made angels instead of you." [Trans.]

4 That is, "if only we had instead of the water of *zamzam* a cool draught from mountain slopes." [Trans.]

or have misgivings about it."

It is said: *He is knowledge of the Hour* means that He is one of the signs of the Hour because when he descends to the earth, it will be known that the Hour has drawn near.

It is said: *He* actually refers to the Qur'an[1] and it is *knowledge of the Hour* because it is the final divine scripture to be revealed.

But it is not clear in either of these readings why God would follow by saying *so do not doubt it*.[2]

…and follow Me. This is a straight path: It is said: This is God's speech and it means: "Follow my guidance (or my religion or my Messenger)." It is also said: "It is something that God has commanded the Prophet himself to say."

وَلَا يَصُدَّنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ ۖ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

(43:62) ***Do not let Satan bar you. Indeed he is your manifest enemy.***

"To bar" (*ṣadd*) means to turn aside. The remainder of the verse is clear.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ عِيسَىٰ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالَ قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَلِأُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي تَخْتَلِفُونَ فِيهِ ۖ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿٦٣﴾

(43:63) ***When Jesus brought the manifest proofs, he said, "I have certainly brought you wisdom and to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about. So be wary of God and obey me."***

Manifest proofs mean the miracles he performed, and *wisdom* refers to the divine teachings he brought in the form of true beliefs and virtuous morals.

…and to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about: Meaning things they differ about in God's law concerning different deeds and happenings. There is nothing to say "the things they differ about" could include, in addition to legal matters, the beliefs whose truth or falsity

1 In Arabic there is no neuter pronoun like "it" in English, so masculine and feminine pronouns can refer to things as well as people. [Trans.]

2 Namely, how do either of these interpretations help resolve people's doubts about the Hour, which such a coda implies. [Trans.]

they dispute. However, it makes more sense—given the phrase *I have certainly brought you wisdom*—that their disagreements should be of a legal nature about actions and matters of daily living. And God knows best.

It is said: *the things that you differ about* means everything you disagree in. And this is as you have seen.

It is said: *to make clear to you* means to make clear to you the matters of your religion rather than your worldly affairs. However, there is nothing to suggest this in the verse itself or from the broader context.

So be wary of God and obey me: He instructs people to be wary of God while instructing people to obey him to confirm that he is only claiming to be a messenger, not a god.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ ۚ هَٰذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٦٤﴾

(43:64) ***Indeed God is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is a straight path."***

In this, he summons people to worship God alone, and declares Him to be his Lord and theirs as well. This delivers a conclusive argument against those who claim his divinity.

فَاخْتَلَفَ الْأَحْزَابُ مِنْ بَيْنِهِمْ ۖ فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٦٥﴾

(43:65) ***But the factions differed among themselves. So woe to the wrongdoers for the punishment of a painful day.***

Among themselves means those to whom Jesus was sent.

This verse means: "The different factions in his community differed about Jesus into those who disbelieved in him, who believed in him and held extreme views about him (*ghuluw*) and those who believed in him but kept to the path of moderation."

…So woe to the wrongdoers for the punishment of a painful day: This is a threat and a warning of punishment against those who go to either extreme of disbelieving in him or believing in his divinity.

Verses 66-78

The *sūrah* now returns to warn people of God's punishment. This section frightens them with descriptions of the Hour and compares the condition of the Godwary to that of the sinners with regards to their divine reward or punishment therein.

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا السَّاعَةَ أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(43:66) ***Do they await anything but that the Hour should overtake them suddenly, while they are unaware?***

"To await" (*naẓar*) means to anticipate.

"Suddenly" (*baghtatan*) means by surprise.

Their being *unaware* of the Hour means that they are heedless of it because they are preoccupied with worldly affairs, as God says elsewhere: *They do not await but a single Cry that would seize them as they wrangle* (36:49). So there is no repetition of meaning between *suddenly* and *while they are unaware*.

So the verse means: What do the faithless anticipate as a result of their disbelief in and denial of God's signs, expect that the Hour takes them suddenly while they are heedless of it and busy with their worldly lives. In other words, their situation is like one who has been warned of his impending doom but does nothing to avert it. Instead, he sits awaiting destruction! The verse alludes to their lack of interest in believing in the truth to be saved from a painful punishment.

الْأَخِلَّاءُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(43:67) ***On that day, friends*** **(akhillāʾ)** ***will be one another's enemies, except for the Godwary.***

Here, the Qur'an uses the Arabic word *akhillāʾ* (sing. *khalīl*) for *friends*. This is because *akhillāʾ* (friends) are those who compensate for one another's deficiencies (*khillah*) and look after one another's needs. It appears that "friends" is used categorically here to refer to both friendship and affection for the sake of God, as in the friendship of the Godwary for the

inhabitants of heaven, and their friendships with others, such as with the inhabitants of this world. So the exception of the Godwary is a continuous exception (*istithnāʾ muttaṣil*).

The reason why friends shall become enemies of one another, aside from the Godwary, is because one of the necessary qualities of a friendship is that friends help and support one another in important matters. But if this help and support is for anything other than God's countenance, then this is helping one another towards everlasting misery and eternal punishment. This is as God relates from the wrongdoers on the Day of Resurrection: "*Woe to me! I wish I had not taken so and so as a friend! Certainly he led me astray from the Reminder after it had come to me…*" (25:28–29). As for the friendship of the Godwary, it becomes stronger because it will benefit them on that day.

In a prophetic tradition, we read:

> On the Day of Resurrection, relations will be cut, lineages will become few and brotherhood will disappear, except for brotherhood for the sake of God. That is God's saying: *On that day, friends will be one another's enemies, except for the Godwary.*[1]

يَا عِبَادِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ تَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(43:68) *O My servants! Today you will have no fear, nor will you grieve.*

This is something God will say to them on the Day of Resurrection, as attested to by the statement which comes below: *Enter paradise…* (43:70). In this, God guarantees their safety from every possible unpleasantness and every assured unpleasantness; for fear comes from the possibility of something unpleasant happening, and grief comes from being sure that it will happen. So if these are removed, fear and grief are also removed.

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(43:69) *Those who believed in Our signs and had been muslims.*

Those who… stands in substitution of *servants* (above) or is an adjective for it; *signs* refers to everything that points to God, whether a prophet,

1 This tradition is narration in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* about this verse from Saʿd b. Muʿādh.

a scripture, or any other sign. And *muslim* here means someone who submitted themselves to God's will and followed His bidding.

ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ أَنْتُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ تُحْبَرُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(43:70) ***Enter paradise, you and your spouses, delighting.***

From the command to enter paradise, it appears that the meaning of "spouses" (*azwāj*) refers to the believing women of this world rather than the maidens of paradise (*ḥūr al-ʿīyn*) because they are already in Paradise, not outside of it.

Delighting (tuḥbarūn)—according to what has been said—means happiness visible upon a person's face, and the word "finery" (*ḥibrah*), which is derived from the same etymological root, means "adornment" or "a pleasant appearance". So the verse means: "Enter paradise, you and your faithful wives, with happiness visible upon your faces *or* adorned with the best finery."

يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِصِحَافٍ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ ۖ وَفِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ وَتَلَذُّ الْأَعْيُنُ ۖ وَأَنْتُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

(43:71) ***They will be served around with golden dishes and goblets and therein will be whatever the souls desire and eyes delight in. And you will remain therein forever.***

A *dish* (ṣuḥfah) means a bowl or something smaller; a "goblet" (*kūb*) is a cup without a handle. By mentioning dishes and goblets, this verse shows that they will enjoy food and drink.

This part of the verse is spoken in the third-person (*they will be served…*), while the verse before it and its own coda are spoken in the second person (*Enter paradise…* and… *you will remain therein forever*). This transition is to magnify the honour and luxury with which they will be welcomed, as if these are so great that they must be told to others to increase their delight and demonstrate the veracity of what they were promised.

…and therein will be whatever the souls desire and eyes delight in: It appears that *whatever their souls desire* means those things connected to physical desire, whether in the form of taste, smell, sound, or touch, that all humans and animals possess. Whatever their *eyes delight in* means

splendor and beauty; this kind of enjoyment is only for human beings, such as seeing a beautiful sight, a handsome face, or glamorous clothing. This is why different expressions are used for the enjoyment souls (*anfus*) and eyes (*aʿyun*); the soul *desires* while the eyes *delight*. And in these two kinds of enjoyment encompass all forms of psychological pleasure for us.

It is also possible to include spiritual and intellectual pleasures in the *delight* of the eyes, for spiritual enjoyment comes from the vision of the heart.

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> In the words *whatever the souls desire and eyes delight in*, God has gathered that which, even if all the creatures gathered together to try and describe the different kinds of blessing they would find in Paradise, they would not be able to conceive of anything not included under these two descriptions.

…and you will remain therein forever: This is both a statement of fact (*khabar*), a promise (*waʿd*), and glad tidings (*tabshīr*) that they shall live forever. And knowing this grants them incomparable and immeasurable spiritual enjoyment.

وَتِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(43:72) ***That is the paradise you have been given to inherit for what you used to do.***

It is said: This means "…that you have been given because of your deeds…."

It is said: "…that you have inherited from the faithless who would have entered it if only they had believed and acted righteously…."

We have discussed both of these readings in our commentary on *It is they who will be the inheritors* (23:10).

لَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ كَثِيرَةٌ مِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(43:73) ***Therein are abundant fruits for you from which you will eat.***

Fruit is mentioned in addition to the above allusions to food and drink to enumerate the blessings. The preposition *from* in *from which you will eat* is for partition. But it also intimates that these fruits will not be exhausted through eating.

إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي عَذَابِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾ لَا يُفَتَّرُ عَنْهُمْ وَهُمْ فِيهِ مُبْلِسُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(43:74–75) ***Indeed the guilty will remain forever in the punishment of hell. It will not be relaxed for them, and they will be despondent in it.***

The guilty means those whose habit was wrongdoing, meaning this includes more than just the faithless. This is supported by the fact that the guilty are being contrasted with the Godwary, a term more particular than the faithful.

"To relax" their punishment means to lighten or reduce it; being "despondent" means they have despaired either of God's mercy or of ever escaping the Fire.

وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَٰكِنْ كَانُوا هُمُ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

(43:76) ***We did not wrong them, but they themselves were wrongdoers.***

This is because God only requited them for their deeds, but they wronged themselves by exposing them to deeds that would lead to their misery and ruin.

وَنَادَوْا يَا مَالِكُ لِيَقْضِ عَلَيْنَا رَبُّكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ مَاكِثُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(43:77) ***They will call out, "O Mālik! Let your Lord finish us off!" He will say, "Indeed you will stay on."***

According to both Sunni and Shiʿi traditions, Mālik is the angel responsible for the fires of hell. The inmates of hell address their requests to Mālik rather than God because they are veiled from Him, as He says: *No indeed! They will be veiled from their Lord on that day* (83:15) and: *He will say, "Begone in it, and do not speak to Me!"* (23:108)

So they will ask Mālik to ask God to finish them off. By this they mean to kill them. In other words, they want Him to erase them from existence utterly to save them from the misery and the terrible punishment they are suffering. And this is a reflection of their worldly habits, whence they used to see death as being non-existence rather than moving from one abode

to another. So when they ask for death, they are asking it in the sense that has been fixed upon their souls from this world. If this is not so, then they have already died and witnessed the reality of things!

He will say, "Indeed you will stay on."—In other words, you will stay in this wretched existence and painful punishment. Here, Mālik is speaking in response to their question.

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لَقَدْ جِئْنَاكُمْ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَكُمْ لِلْحَقِّ كَارِهُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

(43:78) *"We certainly brought you the truth, but most of you were averse to the truth."*

This appears to be a continuation of Mālik's speech, in which he talks on behalf of the angels, of whom he is one. It is said: This is God's speech. However, this is unlikely precisely because the inmates of hell are cut off from their Lord on that day and they cannot speak to God.

The statement is addressed to the inmates of hell insofar as they are human beings. It means: "O human beings, we came to you with the truth but most of you—the guilty—were averse to it."

It is said: *The truth* means all kinds of truth; whatever the truth was, they hated it and were averse to it. As for the ultimate Truth, which is either Divine Unity or the Qur'an, all of them hated it and were averse to it.

Their aversion to the truth means aversion with respect to their secondary nature (*al-ṭabʿ al-thānī*) which they acquire as a result of sinning and disobedience. It is not with respect to their primary nature which is the innate *fiṭrah* upon which all people were created. After all, if they were averse to the Truth on account of this primary nature, then they could not be held morally accountable for rejecting it. God says: *There is no altering God's creation* (30:30). Elsewhere, He says: *by the soul and Him who fashioned it and inspired it with its virtues and vices* (91:7–8).

This verse suggests that the ultimate criterion for eternal happiness or misery is whether someone accepted the truth or rejected it.

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Verses 79–89

Now the *sūrah* returns to what was said before, rebukes the idolaters for plotting against God's Messenger and threatens them with God's devising. It rejects the notion that God has a son and refutes any notion of Him having a partner, before proving that He alone has absolute lordship. The *sūrah* concludes with threats and warnings.

أَمْ أَبْرَمُوا أَمْرًا فَإِنَّا مُبْرِمُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

(43:79) ***Rather have they settled on some plan? Indeed We too are settling.***

"To settle" (*ibrām*) means to tighten.

Based on the context of this and the next verse, this means: "Rather they have devised some plot against you, O Muḥammad! But we too have devised a plot against them." So this verse has the meaning of God's saying: *Do they seek to outmaneuver? But it is the faithless who are the outmaneuvered ones!* (52:42)

أَمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسْمَعُ سِرَّهُمْ وَنَجْوَاهُمْ ۚ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلُنَا لَدَيْهِمْ يَكْتُبُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(43:80) ***Do they suppose that We do not hear their secrets and their secret talks? Yes indeed! And with them are Our messengers, writing down.***

A "secret" (*sirr*) refers to a thought they conceal in their hearts or some whispered conversation between them to which no one else is a party. And insofar as a "secret" is the speech of someone's heart, God refers to His knowledge of both as "hearing."

Yes indeed! And with them are Our messengers, writing down: In other words, "Yes indeed! We hear their secrets and their whispers, and our messengers are entrusted with recording their deeds and writing them down."

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَٰنِ وَلَدٌ فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْعَابِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

(43:81) ***Say, "If the All-beneficent had a son, I would have been the first of the worshippers."***

This refutes the divinity of a son of god by refuting the very fact of such a being's existence, knowing that he does not. In this verse, the conditional particle *in* is used, rather than *law*, to indicate impossibility (while in this context one would expect it to be said: "If (*law*) the All-beneficent had a son…") to force them to give up their arrogance and come down to the level of fairness.

So it means: "Tell them: If the All-beneficent had a son, as they claim, then you would have been the first to worship him, because a son must be of the same nature as the father. But I know that there is no such being, and that is why I do not worship him. It is not out of any ill-feeling or spite."

Other meanings have also been suggested for this verse.

One is: "If God had a son, as you claim, then I would still worship God alone. I would not worship the son as you claim I should."

One reads: The particle *in* is used here for negation, meaning: "God has no son, so I am the first to worship Him and believe in His Divine Unity amongst you."

Another says: *Worshippers* (ʿābidīn) here actually comes from *ʿa-b-d* in the sense of "disdain." So the verse means: "If the All-beneficent had a son, I am the first to refuse to worship him because whatever is born must have a body and whatever has a body cannot be God."

Yet another is: "Just as surely as I am not the first person to worship God, God has no son." In other words: "If you can claim such an impossible thing, then I can claim something just as impossible."

There are other interpretations still, but the apparent meaning of the verse is as we have described it above.

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(43:82) ***Clear is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, the Lord of the Throne, of whatever they allege.***

This declares God free from whatever they ascribe to Him. It appears that *the Lord of the Throne* is an explanatory conjunction (*ʿaṭf bayān*) for *the Lord of the heavens and the earth*. This is because *the heavens and the earth* refer to everything in the perceptible realm (*ʿālam al-mashhūd*), and it is the Throne of His dominion upon which He reclines to govern it.

It also alludes to a conclusive argument for God's oneness. Even the Prophet's opponents admitted that the act of creation belongs to God alone, and this is one of the roles attached to the Throne of His dominion.

Moreover, governance is a part of creation and origination, as this means originating the natural order that governs all His creations. So governance is also a role of His Throne. So His lordship over the Throne is His lordship over all the heavens and the earth.

فَذَرْهُمْ يَخُوضُوا وَيَلْعَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يُلَاقُوا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(43:83) ***So leave them to gossip and play until they encounter their day which they are promised.***

Here, God issues a general warning to the faithless by bidding the Prophet to ignore them until they encounter the terrible punishment on the Day of Judgement about which they were warned.

The verse means: So leave them to gossip about their falsehoods and play in this world. They will be preoccupied with these things until they encounter the day of which they had been forewarned; the Day of Resurrection that was mentioned above in the verse: *Do they await anything but that the Hour should overtake them suddenly, while they are unaware?* (43:66)

وَهُوَ الَّذِي فِي السَّمَاءِ إِلَٰهٌ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَٰهٌ ۚ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٨٤﴾

(43:84) ***It is He who is God in the heavens, and God on the earth; and He is the All-Wise, the All-Knowing.***

Meaning He is the One God worthy of worship in heavens, and the One God worthy of worship in the earth. In other words, He alone is worthy of the worship of the inhabitants of the heavens and the inhabitants of the earth. The repetition of the word "God" (*ilāh*) is said to be for emphasis. And saying He is in the heavens and the earth means that they are connected to his divinity; it does not mean He resides in one or both of them.

This verse stands in contrast with what the idolaters claim, namely that the heavens and the earth each have their own deities.

The coda *and He is the All-Wise, the All-Knowing* signifies that He alone is all-wise and all-knowing, and this also alludes to He alone possessing Lordship, of which knowledge and wisdom are logical corollaries.

وَتَبَارَكَ الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَعِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ

السَّاعَةِ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(43:85) ***Blessed is He to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, and with Him is the knowledge of the Hour, and to Him you will be brought back.***

This praises God for being blessed, which is being a source for abundant goodness. All three of the qualities mentioned in this verse are proof of his Divine Unity in lordship; as for the kingdom of everything, this is obvious—the Lord is the one who manages all the affairs of the kingdom; as for the fact that He alone has knowledge of the Hour, the station of the Hour is the utmost station in proximity to Him, to which all things must go, and how can anyone direct things without knowing their ultimate purpose? So He is the Lord and not those whom people invoke besides. As for the fact that everyone shall return to Him, this is because this return is for the purpose of judgement and recompense, which is the ultimate act of governance. Whomsoever it is that a thing returns to, He governs that thing, and whoever governs a thing is its Lord.

وَلَا يَمْلِكُ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ الشَّفَاعَةَ إِلَّا مَنْ شَهِدَ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٦﴾

(43:86) ***Those whom they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, except those who are witness to the truth and who know.***

The context here is general; *those whom they invoke* means those whom they worship besides Him. This includes anything taken as an object of worship that is not Him, whether angels, jinn, human beings, or something else.

To the truth means to Divine Unity, and being a *witness* to it means to acknowledge it.

And who know—such that they know the real condition of those for whom they intercede and the reality of their actions in this life, as God says elsewhere: *None shall speak except whom the All-beneficent permits and who says what is right* (78:38). And when this is the condition of the intercessors, this means they do not possess the power of intercession until they bear witness to the truth. So they will only intercede for the

monotheists (*ahl al-tawḥīd*), as God says: *and they do not intercede except for someone He approves of* (21:28).

So this verse explicitly affirms the existence of intercession (*shafāʿah*).

وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُم مَّنْ خَلَقَهُمْ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ ۖ فَأَنَّىٰ يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(43:87) ***If you ask them, "Who created them?" they will surely say, "God." Then where do they stray?***

Meaning how much longer will they turn aside from the Truth which is Divine Unity and towards the falsehood of idolatry? After all, they already acknowledge that there is no creator except God, and that because He is the creator of all, He is also the governor of all. This is because, as has become clear, governorship (*tadbīr*) is inseparable from creation. So the only Lord worthy of worship is the one to whom all creation belongs, and that is God.

وَقِيلِهِ يَا رَبِّ إِنَّ هَٰؤُلَاءِ قَوْمٌ لَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

(43:88) ***And his plaint: "My Lord! Indeed these are a people who will not have faith!"***

His refers to the Prophet without doubt, and "plaint" (*qīl*) is a verbal noun like *qawl* or *qāl*. It is said that *his plaint* is connected to *the Hour* in the verse *and with Him is the knowledge of the Hour* (43:85), which makes the meaning: "And with Him is knowledge of what he says: '*My Lord! Indeed these are a people who will not have faith!*'"

فَاصْفَحْ عَنْهُمْ وَقُلْ سَلَامٌ ۚ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

(43:89) ***So disregard them, and say, "Peace!" Soon they will know.***

Here God commands the Prophet to ignore them and not to have any hope of them believing. When He tells His Prophet *say, "Peace!"* He means to bid them farewell without any concern. But when He says *Soon they will know*, this is a threat and a warning.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Iḥtijāj*, it is narrated from ʿAlī in a lengthy tradition:
When God says: *If the All-beneficent had a son, I would have been the first of the worshippers*—it means "of those who repudiate."

So this exegesis (*taʾwīl*) is such that its inner meaning (*bāṭin*) contravenes its apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*).

Author's comments: It appears that by this he means that this interpretation is not what the word *ʿābid* would be taken to mean if it was used categorically.

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narrators from Hishām b. al-Ḥakam:
Abū Shākir al-Dayṣānī[1] said: "This Qur'an contains a verse that accords with what we say."
I asked him: "What is it?"
He said: "*It is He who is God in the sky, and God on the earth*" (43:84).
I did not know how to respond to him, so I informed Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]. He told me: "This is the doctrine of an uncouth heretic. Next time you see him, ask him: 'What is your name in Kufa?' He will say: 'such-and-such.' Then ask him: 'Now what is your name in Basra?' He will tell you: 'such-and-such.' Then tell him: 'In the same way, God is our Lord—He is God in the heavens and He is God upon the earth. He is God in the oceans and He is God in the deserts. In every place, He is God!'"
So I went back to Abū Shākir and told him this. Then he said: "You have brought this from Hejaz!"[2]

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about God's saying *Those whom they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession* (43:86), it says:
Meaning those whom they worship in this world shall not have the power of intercession for those who worship them.

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, in a chain of narrators from Abū Hāshim al-Jaʿfarī:
I asked Abū Jaʿfar the second [Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād]: "What is the meaning of 'the One' (*al-Wāḥid*)?"
He said: "The one whose oneness (*waḥdāniyyah*) all tongues are unanimous in declaring. Because of His saying: *If you ask them, 'Who created them?' they will surely say, 'God'* (43:87)."

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1 Abu Shākir was a contemporary of Imam al-Ṣādiq, known for holding heretical views. [Trans.]

2 In other words, Abū Shākir could see that this argument was not of Hishām's own devising. But instead he had brought it from his master, Imam al-Ṣādiq, who was resident in Medina. [Trans.]

Chapter 44

Sūrah al-Dukhān

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Verses 1–8

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

The central theme of this sūrah can be summarized as warning those who doubt the Book of divine punishment in this world and punishment in the Hereafter. In the context, this is explained by the fact it is a clear book (*kitāb mubīn*) which has been sent down from God to the one whom He sent to people in order to warn them. This book came down as a mercy from Him to His servants in the best possible way on the Night of Ordainment (*laylat al-qadr*), and in which every definitive matter is resolved.

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But despite this, people—meaning the faithless—doubt it while playing in their tumult. They shall be overtaken by a painful punishment in this world, then they shall return to their Lord who will exact vengeance upon them after sentencing them to an eternal punishment.

Then the sūrah provides them with a parallel for the first kind of punishment in the story of Moses when he was sent to Pharaoh's people to save the Israelites. They denied him and drowned as a result.

Next, it turns to their denial of the second of the two punishments, namely that they shall return to God on the Day of Judgement. First, it provides conclusive arguments that this day will certainly come to pass. Second, it relates some accounts of what shall befall the guilty on that day and the different kinds of punishment they will suffer. Third, it mentions the rewards of the Godwary in the form of a good life and a noble station.

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The tone and context of the verses attests to this sūrah being revealed at Mecca.

حم ۝١ وَٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلۡمُبِينِ ۝٢

(44:1–2) ***Ḥā, Mīm. By the Manifest Book!***

By is used to invoke an oath, and *the Manifest Book* is the Qur'an.

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنْذِرِينَ ﴿٣﴾

(44:3) *Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night, and indeed We have been warning.*

The *blessed night* in which the Qur'an was sent down is the Night of Ordainment, as indicated by the verse: *Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment* (97:1). Saying it is blessed (*mubārakah*) means that it contains abundant goodness which disperses God's boundless mercy throughout His creation. And God has also said: *What will show you what is the Night of Ordainment? The Night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months* (97:2–3).

The word *night* suggests that this is a night like those which the earth usually experiences. The words …*is resolved in it* (yufraqu) suggests that this night recurs continuously. The verse *The month of Ramadan is one in which the Qur'an was sent down* (2:185) suggests that this night repeats with each passing Ramadan according to the lunar calendar, and it occurs once in this month every lunar year. As for the exact night, there are only allusions to this in the Qur'an, but we shall examine the narrations on this topic in our study of the narrations below.

When God says He sent down the book in the verses:

Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night…

Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment. (97:1)

The month of Ramadan is one in which the Qur'an was sent down as guidance to mankind, with manifest proofs of guidance and the Criterion. (2:185)

This means that the Qur'an in its entirety was sent down on this night. And the following verses do not contradict this:

We have sent the Qur'an in parts so that you may read it to the people a little at a time, and We have sent it down piecemeal. (17:106)

The faithless say, "Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?" So it is, that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it to you in a measured tone. (25:32)

But when a definitive sūrah is sent down…. (47:20)

And whenever a sūrah is sent down, they look at one another…. (9:127)

These and other verses, not to mention countless traditions describing the particular occasions in response to which verses and even entire

sūrahs were revealed do not contradict the whole Qur'an being sent down on the Night of Ordainment. This is because we can interpret this to mean that the Qur'an was revealed twice; once altogether on a single night in the month of Ramadan and another gradually over the course of twenty-three years, which is the duration of the Prophet's mission.

However, what cannot be doubted is that the Qur'an is made up of sūrahs and verses, each of which have their own individual contexts that relate to the particular circumstances of revelation, that it could not have been sent down all at once. Some of these verses came down in relation to particular events and specific incidents connected to particular times, places, people, and circumstances, so they would make no sense without the realization of these various circumstances. So, if something else had happened in place of these circumstances, the verses would have had to differ in content to the form in which they were ultimately revealed. Therefore it is impossible that the Qur'an could have been sent down in an identical form once altogether and once gradually.

So if one was to propose that the Qur'an was sent down twice, it would be necessary to distinguish between the two by saying that once it came down generally (*bi al-ijmāl*) and once fully-elaborated (*bi al-tafṣīl*). And it is to this God refers when He says: *a Book, whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated, from One all-wise, all-aware* (11:1), and: *We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason, and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book, surely sublime and firm* (43:3–4). And we have discussed the meanings of firmness and elaboration in our commentary on the Sūrahs Hūd and al-Zukhruf.

It is said: The Qur'an being sent down on a blessed night means that its gradual revelation began on the Night of Ordainment in the month of Ramadan, so the first verses of the Qur'an—Sūrah al-ʿAlaq or Sūrah al-Ḥamd—came down on that night.

This opinion is based on the assumption that there is some contradiction between the Book being revealed all at once on a single night and it being revealed gradually, as is indicated by the previous verses. However, as you know, there is no such contradiction between the verses. The reader will have also noticed that this interpretation contradicts the apparent meaning of the verses.

It is said: It was first sent down altogether to the heavens of this world on the Night of Ordainment, then it descended from the heavens of this world to the earth gradually over the space of twenty-three years in the

course of the Prophet's mission.

This opinion is derived from traditions that have been transmitted in explanation of clear verses that state the Qur'an came down in one go. God-willing, we will deal with these in our discussion of the narrations below.

…and indeed We have been warning: This phrase occupies a position of giving rationale. It indicates that God has been warning mankind since before sending this warning. In other words, sending down a revealed scripture like the Qur'an is not something novel or unexpected; it is nothing more than a warning, and warning mankind through sending revelation to prophets and messengers and appointing them to warn people has been God's habit with those who came before.

فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

(44:4) ***Every definitive matter is separated in it.***

In it means in the Night of Ordainment. To separate (*farq*) means to divide two things in such a way as to distinguish them from one other. This stands in contrast to something being "definitive" (*ḥakīm*); a *definitive matter* means something whose parts are not distinct from one another, nor are its particular qualities or states specified. This is alluded to in the verse: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21).

With regards to the Divine Decree (*al-qaḍāʾ al-ilāhī*), all matters devolve to two stages: the general or indefinite stage, and the elaborated stage. Based on what this verse says, the Night of Ordainment in which *every definitive matter is separated* is a night on which matters move from the definitive level to that of separation and elaboration. It is on this night that the Qur'an descended, and it is one of those definitive affairs separated therein.

Perhaps God made His Prophet aware of particular events that would transpire during the course of his mission and the verses and sūrahs of His Book whose revelation would accompany them, and whose revelation these events would engender. So He informed him of what parts of the Qur'an would be revealed, and in this way the Qur'an would have descended fully-elaborated in one go before being revealed again gradually.

The upshot of this understanding is that the Prophet was made fully-aware of the Qur'an at the moment that the matter of revelation reached

the level of elaboration in the Divine Decree but before it descended to the earth and inhered at the level of individuated existence. With this reading, there is no need for us to distinguish between the two stages of revelation in the form of a general revelation (*ijmāl*) and an elaborated one (*tafṣīl*) as we did in the first instance.

Some commentators appear to read *Every definitive matter is separated in it* as meaning to elaborate the divine teachings, laws, etc. in the Qur'an. However, this reading is refuted by the fact that the words *separated in it* are in the imperfect tense, signifying something that is continuous. What is continuous is the elaboration of cosmic matters on the Night of Ordainment after they have been made definitive. On the other hand, there is no continuous elaboration of the divine teachings and laws in the Qur'an. If God had meant this, it would have been more appropriate to use the perfect tense: "Every definitive matter has been separated in it."

It is said: An affair's being definitive means it being made firm after being separated, not the definitiveness that precedes elaboration. This would make the meaning: In that night every definitive matter that does not increase or decrease is decreed. However the reading we have presented above is closer to the apparent meaning of the text.

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أَمْرًا مِنْ عِنْدِنَا ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ ۝٥

(44:5) ***As an affair*** **(amr)** ***from Us. Indeed We have been sending,***

An affair (amr) means "a matter" (*shaʾn*), and it is a circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*) for *matter* in the previous verse. This renders the meaning: "In which is separated every matter while it is an affair from us that originates with us." However, *amr* could also be read in the sense of *ordinance*—as opposed to "prohibition" (*nahī*)—in which case it would mean: "In which is separated every matter by our command." In any case, this is connected to the verb *separated*, in the above verse.

Alternatively, it could be read as connected to the verb *We sent it down* (44:3), meaning that the Book is either an affair of Ours or it descended by a command from us. *Indeed We have been sending* supports this reading to some extent, as it serves as an explanation of the reason for it. This would make the meaning: "We sent it down as an affair from Us, because it is Our habit to send prophets and messengers."

رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ۝٦

(44:6) ***as a mercy from your Lord. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing,***

Meaning, the fact that it has been sent down is a mercy from your Lord, that We sent it down to shower people with mercy, or that it was sent down because of your Lord's mercy. According to the first reading, *mercy* is a circumstantial qualifier, and a purposive object (*mafʿūl lahu*) according to the second and third.

…from your Lord represents a transition from speaking as God in the first-person, to God speaking about Himself in the third-person. This is to show His special concern for the Prophet as it is to him that He sent the Qur'an, and he is the one sent to warn people.

Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing means that He is *All-hearing* of what people ask, and *All-knowing* of their needs. He hears what they ask and knows their need for guidance from your Lord, so He sent down a book and dispatched a messenger as a mercy from Himself to them.

رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا ۖ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُوقِنِينَ ﴿٧﴾

(44:7) ***the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and whatever is between them, should you have conviction.***

Because the idolaters thought that every kind of creature has its own god or gods, and perhaps one group of them will adopt a different god to another, God follows the words *from your Lord* with *the Lord of the heavens and the earth…* so that no one will imagine that this is merely the Prophet's own personal lord as they have their own gods amongst themselves. Rather, they will understand that He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything in between. And it is for the same reason that God follows this in the next verse: *There is no god except Him…*

When God says *should you have conviction*, this stipulation—as Zamakhsharī has said—is like when we might say: "This is an example of Zayd's famous generosity, if you have heard of it." So the phrase means: "What those with conviction know is that He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between them. And if you are one of them, you would know that too."

لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ ۖ رَبُّكُمْ وَرَبُّ آبَائِكُمُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٨﴾

(44:8) ***There is no god except Him: He gives life and brings death, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.***

The previous verse restricted Lordship to God alone. This includes God's dominion and governance over His creation. As for divinity (*ulūhiyyah*), this means being worthy of worship, which is a corollary of Lordship. And this is why He follows it with the profession of faith in Divine Unity, for it negates every deity besides him.

He gives life and death are two of the traits most unique to Him and they belong to the affairs of governance. And their being mentioned here to some extent prepares the ground for the warning of the Resurrection that is to come below.

Your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers states completely and unequivocally that He is their Lord and the Lord of their forefathers, so they should worship Him rather than excusing their idolatry by saying that they are following their forefathers. And to maximise the impact of this statement, there is a transition from the third-person ("He") to the second-person ("you" [pl.]).

Both *He gives life and death* and *your Lord and…* are predicates for an implicit subject, whose meaning is "It is He who…."

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, concerning the words *Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night* (44:3):
The blessed night is the Night of Ordainment. This is narrated from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq].

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, from ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm, from his father, from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from ʿUmar b. Udhaynah, from al-Fuḍayl, Zurārah, and Muḥammad b. Muslim, from Ḥamrān:
He [Ḥamrān] asked Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] about the verse *Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night* (44:3).
The Imam said: "Yes, it is the Night of Ordainment and it comes every year in the month of Ramadan, during the last ten nights. God only sent the Qur'an down on the Night of Ordainment; He says *Every definitive matter is separated in it*, meaning that on the Night of Ordainment is determined everything that will happen during the next year (like good, evil, acts of worship, sin,

birth, death, and sustenance) until the next Night of Ordainment. Whatever is determined for that year and decreed is irrevocable (*maḥtūm*), but it still depends on God's will."

Author's comments: When he says that it is irrevocable but still depends on God's will, this means it is irrevocable from the aspect of the system of cause and effect so that nothing can prevent it from occurring unless God wills so.

(3) In *Baṣāʾir*, from ʿAbbās b. Maʿrūf, from Saʿdān b. Muslim, from ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān:

I asked about the middle night of Shaʿbān and he told me: "I don't know anything about that, but it is on the nineteenth night of the month of Ramadan that provisions are apportioned and appointed times written. On that night, the contracts of the pilgrim come out and God looks attentively to His servants; He forgives all but the intoxicated wine drinker. It is on the night of the twenty-third that *every definitive matter is separated*; this affair is terminated and that one is set in motion."

I asked: "For who?"

He said: "For your master. And were it not for this, he would not know."

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Muḥammad b. Naṣr, Ibn Mundhir, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim publicize from Ibn ʿAbbas, concerning the verse *Every definitive matter is separated in it* (44:4):

On the Night of Ordainment, all the events of the coming year are transcribed from the Mother Book—whether provision, death, life, or rain—even the *ḥajj* pilgrim is written on this night: So-and-so will make *ḥajj* and so-and-so will make *ḥajj*.

Author's comments: There are many reports about the Night of Ordainment, what is decreed in it and which night it falls on exactly. The most reliable of these will be discussed in our commentary on Sūrah al-Qadr, God-willing.

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Verses 9–33

Having described in the previous verses how the Qur'an is a clear book which was sent down on the best night of the year to God's Messenger in order to warn people as an act of divine mercy, the sūrah now turns to those who persist in doubting this book. It threatens them with punishment in this world and divine retribution on the Day of Resurrection, before striking a parable with the story of Moses going to the people of Pharaoh and how they denied him and drowned as a result.

This story hints at the fact that God will save the Prophet and those who believe in him from the obstinate Quraysh by bringing them out of Mecca before destroying the leaders of the Quraysh who pursued them.

بَلْ هُمْ فِي شَكٍّ يَلْعَبُونَ ۝٩

(44:9) ***Rather they play around in doubt.***

They are the Prophet's people. And the adversative *rather* (bal) is used to reinforce something implied in the previous verse, namely that they are those who have no conviction and do not believe in the description provided of Prophet's message or the scripture which has been sent down to him. Instead, they are in doubt and uncertainty about it. *They play* in the sense that they are preoccupied with worldly concerns. Zamakhsharī suggests that this adversative is in conjunction with *should you have conviction* (44:7).[1]

فَارْتَقِبْ يَوْمَ تَأْتِي السَّمَاءُ بِدُخَانٍ مُبِينٍ ۝١٠

(44:10) ***So watch out for the day when the sky brings on a manifest smoke,***

Watch out means to expect, and this is a warning of punishment in the form of the skies being filled with smoke that will swallow people up. But commentators have disagreed about the punishment referenced in

1 In other words: "Rather they do not have conviction; they play around in doubt instead." [Trans.]

this verse.

Some say it refers to a famine that afflicted the inhabitants of Mecca when they persisted in disbelieving in the Prophet and persecuting him and his followers. They say that it came about because the Prophet invoked God, saying: "O my God! A famine like that of Joseph!" So the ground became arid and the Quraysh suffered a terrible famine. Then, when a person was suffering the pangs of starvation, he would see as if there was smoke between him and the heavens. They had to eat carrion and bones. Then they came to the Prophet and said: "O Muḥammad! You came and lectured us about family bonds, but here your people are perishing!" They promised that if God relieved them of this famine they would believe, so the Prophet prayed and invoked God to make the soil fertile and the harvest plentiful again. So God relieved them of their famine, but they returned to their idolatry and broke their promise.

It is said: The aforementioned smoke is one of the Signs of the Hour which has not yet come to pass. It will come before the Setting of the Hour and enter people's ears until their heads become like that of a roasted calf (*hanīdh*). A believer will be afflicted as though he has a cold, and the entire earth will be like a smoke-filled house without any respite. This will endure for forty days.

Perhaps it could be said the Day of Smoke refers to the day on which Mecca was captured; when the Muslim army entered Mecca, they kicked up a great cloud of dust. It might also be said that it is the Day of Resurrection. And both opinions are as you see .

يَغْشَى النَّاسَ ۖ هَٰذَا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

(44:11) ***enveloping people. "This is a painful punishment.***

In other words, surrounding them from all directions. *People* refers to the inhabitants of Mecca according to the first opinion, and the entirety of mankind according to the second.

رَبَّنَا اكْشِفْ عَنَّا الْعَذَابَ إِنَّا مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(44:12) ***Our Lord! Remove from us this punishment. Indeed we have believed!"***

This recounts what people will say when the punishment of the Smoke arrives. In other words: "People will say on the day that a visible smoke

covers the skies: 'This is a painful punishment!'" And they ask God to remove it from them by acknowledging His lordship and making a show of belief in His true religion: *Remove from us this punishment. Indeed we have believed!*

أَنَّىٰ لَهُمُ الذِّكْرَىٰ وَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٣﴾

(44:13) ***What will the admonition avail them, when a manifest Messenger had already come to them,***

How will they take admonition or submit to the truth, while there has already come to them a manifest messenger the truth of whose message cannot be doubted, namely Muḥammad. This verse rejects the sincerity of their promise.

ثُمَّ تَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا مُعَلَّمٌ مَجْنُونٌ ﴿١٤﴾

(44:14) ***but they turned away from him, and said, "a tutored madman!"***

From him refers to the Prophet, and they say *a tutored madman!* about to the Prophet; grammatically, these words are predicates for an implicit subject—a pronoun "he" that refers to the Prophet. This means that they turned their faces from the Messenger and said: "He is a tutored madman!" So first of all they accused him of having been taught by someone else, but he attributes whatever he has learnt to God, who Himself says: *We certainly know that they say, "It is only a human that instructs him."* (16:103) Secondly, they accuse him of being a madman who has lost his good sense.

إِنَّا كَاشِفُو الْعَذَابِ قَلِيلًا ۚ إِنَّكُمْ عَائِدُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(44:15) ***Indeed We will withdraw the punishment a little; but you will indeed revert.***

In other words, We will relieve you of the punishment for a short time, but then you will go back to your previous state of faithlessness and denial. This is based on the first opinion, above (that the verse refers to the inhabitants of Mecca). This verse emphasizes God's rejection of the sincerity of their promise to believe.

As for according to the second opinion (that the verse refers to all

mankind on the Day of Resurrection), the nearest reading to that reading is that you will return to your punishment on the Day of Resurrection.

يَوْمَ نَبْطِشُ الْبَطْشَةَ الْكُبْرَىٰ إِنَّا مُنْتَقِمُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(44:16) ***The day We shall strike with the most terrible striking, We will indeed take vengeance.***

According to al-Rāghib, "to strike" (*baṭsh*) means seizing something violently. Based on the first opinion (above), the Day God refers to is the Battle of Badr; based on the second, He refers to the Day of Resurrection. Perhaps the second reading is given more weight by the fact God describes His striking as *the most terrible*. After all, God's striking and punishment is greatest on that day. He says: *Him God will punish with the greatest punishment* (88:24). By the same token, His reward is greatest on that day: *and the reward of the Hereafter is surely greatest* (16:41).

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَجَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿١٧﴾

(44:17) ***Certainly We tried the people of Pharaoh before them, when a noble Messenger came to them,***

"To try someone" (*fitnah*) means to put them to the test to determine how they really are. *When a noble Messenger came to them* explains the nature of the test. The *noble Messenger* is Moses, who is called "noble" (*karīm*) means someone endowed with praiseworthy character traits. al-Rāghib says:

When God is described with "nobility" (*karam*), this refers to his manifest generosity and kindness; for example, when He says: *my Lord is indeed all-sufficient, all-generous (*karīm*)* (27:40). As for when a human being is described as *karīm*, this describes the virtuous manners and behavior which he demonstrates. But he is not called *karīm* until that appears from him. He says that everything that manifests nobility with respect to its kind or category is described as *karīm*: *We have caused to grow in it of every noble kind [of vegetation]* (26:7); *Fields and noble places* (44:26); *This is indeed a noble Qur'an* (56:77); *but speak to them noble words* (17:23).

أَنْ أَدُّوا إِلَيَّ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ ۖ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿١٨﴾

(44:18) ***"Deliver the servants of God to me; indeed I am a trusted***

Messenger to you.

This explains the coming of the Messenger. When a Messenger comes, this means He conveys His message. One part of Moses' message to Pharaoh and his people was that they must send the Israelites with him and not persecute them. *The servants of God* mean the Israelites; he refers to them with this title to engender mercy and to insinuate that in their tyranny and aggression against them, they have really aggressed against God because these are God's servants.

When he says *indeed I am a trusted Messenger to you*, he describes himself as "trusted" to dispel any notion that he might betray them in his claim to be a divinely-sent messenger on a mission to free the Israelites from their captivity; in other words, that if Pharaoh releases the Israelites, he will not lead them against the Egyptians to turn them out of their land. This is a claim God quotes Pharaoh as making: *"This is indeed an expert magician who seeks to expel you from your land with his magic*" (26:34–35).

It is said: *Servants of God* is actually Moses addressing Pharaoh and his people, and the sentence actually means: "Give me what you have been commanded, O servants of God!" However, this reading does not accord with the apparent meaning of the text.

وَأَنْ لَا تَعْلُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ ۖ إِنِّي آتِيكُمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿١٩﴾

(44:19) ***Do not defy God. Indeed I bring you a manifest authority***

In other words: Do not behave arrogantly towards God by denying His message and ignoring what He has commanded you to do; after all, denying the message of a Messenger means defying and behaving haughtily towards the one who sent him. The evidence for this reading is the fact that Moses explains the prohibition with the words: *Indeed I bring you a manifest authority*. Meaning: I bring you an irrefutable proof in the form of miracles and sound arguments.

It is said: Part of the eloquence of this verse is that Moses combines "deliver" with "trusted" and "defiance" with "authority."

وَإِنِّي عُذْتُ بِرَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ أَنْ تَرْجُمُونِ ﴿٢٠﴾

(44:20) ***I seek the protection of my Lord and your Lord, lest you should stone me.***

I take refuge with my Lord against your stoning me, so you will not be able to do that. This appears to refer to the assurances God gave him before he came to Pharaoh and his people, as we read in the verse: *The two of them said, "Our Lord! We are indeed afraid that he will forestall us or will overstep the bounds." He said, "Do not be afraid, for I will be with the two of you, hearing and seeing."* (20:45–46)

The above demonstrates the falsity of the opinion that this was before God had told him that they were not able to stone him; *they will not touch you* (28:35).

وَإِنْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا لِي فَاعْتَزِلُونِ ﴿٢١﴾

(44:21) *And if you do not believe me, keep out of my way."*

In other words, if you will not believe in me, then keep away from me; do not be with me or against me, do not do good or evil to me. It is said this means "turn away from me and cut yourselves off from me", but this is unlikely.

فَدَعَا رَبَّهُ أَنَّ هَٰؤُلَاءِ قَوْمٌ مُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(44:22) *Then he invoked his Lord, "These are indeed a guilty lot."*

Meaning he called on Him saying that these people are guilty. The reason behind his supplication is mentioned as part of it, namely that they were transgressing to the extent that they deserved to perish. And we can know that this was his supplication from God's answer: "*Set out with My servants by night*…."

فَأَسْرِ بِعِبَادِي لَيْلًا إِنَّكُمْ مُتَّبَعُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(44:23) *"Set out with My servants by night. You will indeed be pursued,*

The word *isrāʾ* used in the above verse already means to travel by night, so God mentions *by night* (laylan) to emphasize this and make it explicit. *My servants* means the Israelites. *You will indeed be pursued* means that Pharaoh and his army will follow you; this is a new sentence serving to explain what will happen after they set out by night. And this is a succinct statement, as some details are left implicit. Fully unpacked, it means: "Set out with My servants by night. You will indeed be pursued. Your pursuers

shall be Pharaoh and his army."

وَاتْرُكِ الْبَحْرَ رَهْوًا ۖ إِنَّهُمْ جُنْدٌ مُغْرَقُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(44:24) ***And leave the sea calm; they will indeed be a drowned host."***

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Rāghib says in his *Mufradāt*:

> *Leave the sea calm* means at peace. It is also said: It means [leave the sea] as a wide path, which is correct.

They will indeed be a drowned host explains the rationale for God telling them to *leave the sea calm*.

This too is a very succinct verse, which leaves much implicit for the sake of brevity. In full, it means: "Set out with My servants by night. You will be pursued by Pharaoh and his army until you reach the sea. There, you must strike it with your staff and a path will open up for you to cross it. Cross the sea and then leave it calm, or open as it is. They will rush into it hoping to catch you, whereat they will become a drowned host."

كَمْ تَرَكُوا مِنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَزُرُوعٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَنَعْمَةٍ كَانُوا فِيهَا فَاكِهِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

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(44:25–27) ***How many gardens and springs did they leave behind; fields and noble places; and the bounties wherein they took delight!***

How many is used here to emphasize a great number of them. *Gardens…* onwards describes what they left behind. *Noble places* are beautiful and lavish abodes. *Bounties* means those things whose benefits they enjoyed. *Took delight* (fākihīn) means speaking with one's friends, but it could also refer to the enjoyment of different kinds of fruits.

كَذَٰلِكَ ۖ وَأَوْرَثْنَاهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(44:28) ***Thusly; And We bequeathed them to another people.***

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It is said: *Thusly* (kadhālik) means "the affair was thus."

It is also said: It means "We will do thus when We want to ruin someone."

It is said: It refers to the idea drawn from the previous discussion, meaning: "In this way, we brought them out from it."

It is also possible to read this as a circumstantial qualifier for the things they left behind, meaning: "How often did they leave things behind in that way."

And God knows best.

And We bequeathed them to another people: *Them* refers to the things they left behind; *gardens* and so on. The meaning is obvious.

فَمَا بَكَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا كَانُوا مُنْظَرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(44:29) ***So neither the heavens wept for them, nor the earth. Nor were they granted any respite.***

When the heavens or the earth weep over a thing lost, this is an imaginary allusion. So when the Qur'an says that the heavens and the earth did not weep over them, this demonstrates their insignificance in the eyes of God and the fact that their destruction meant nothing in the grand scheme of the cosmos.

…Nor were they granted any respite: This refers to the speed at which the Divine Decree and the Lord's power overwhelmed them; it shows there was nothing that could shield them or any means they could use to try and prevent it from befalling them.

وَلَقَدْ نَجَّيْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ ﴿٣٠﴾

(44:30) ***Certainly We delivered the Children of Israel from a humiliating torment,***

This is what befell them while they were Pharaoh's prisoners, such as their sons being put to death and their women spared.

مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَالِيًا مِنَ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(44:31) ***from Pharaoh. Indeed he was a tyrant among the profligates.***

From Pharaoh is a substitute for *from a humiliating torment* either in the sense that he was the one who wrought this humiliating torment upon them, or in the hyperbolic sense that Pharaoh himself was that humiliating torment.

Indeed he was a tyrant among the profligates means that he was arrogant, even amongst the profligates and those who aggressed.

وَلَقَدِ اخْتَرْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(44:32) ***Certainly We chose them knowingly above all the worlds.***

Based on the context, this means: "We chose them because we knew that they deserved to be chosen."

The meaning of *worlds* (ʿālamīn) here means all the nations, if by *chose* God means they were singled out from some aspects, such as the many prophets they were given; for the Israelites are distinguished from all other nations by how many prophets God sent to them from amongst themselves. They are also marked out by the fact that they spent a long time wandering the desert, shaded by clouds and eating manna and quails, and many other such distinctions.

And *worlds* means the people of their time, if God uses *chose* in the categorical sense. After all, they were not chosen above the Muslim community, whom God addresses with the verse: *You are the best nation brought forth for mankind…* (3:110) and: *He has chosen you and has not placed for you any obstacle in the religion* (22:78)

وَآتَيْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ مَا فِيهِ بَلَاءٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

(44:33) ***And We gave them some signs in which there was a manifest tribulation.***

A tribulation (*balāʾ*) means a test and a trial. In other words: "We gave the Israelites some signs in the form of miracles that contained a clear test for them." Some of these miracles are unheard of for any other nation, and they were clearly put to the test in this way.

It is said: *In which* shows that there were other matters too, such as their miraculous nature.

And by concluding the story with these four verses, beginning with *Certainly We delivered…* (44:30) and ending with *…a manifest tribulation* (44:33), this serves as a kind of comfort to the Prophet and an allusion to the fact that God will save him and those who believe in him from the Pharaohs of Mecca, and that He will choose them and establish them in the earth then see how they behave.

Examining Narrations

(1) From *Jawāmiʿ al-Jāmiʿ*, concerning His saying: *So watch out for*

the day when the sky brings on a manifest smoke (44:10):
They have differed about the meaning of "smoke." It is said: It is some smoke that will come from the heavens before the Setting of the Hour. It will enter the ears of the faithless until their heads become like that of a roasted calf (*hanīdh*). A believer will be afflicted as though he has a cold, and the entire earth will be like a smoke-filled house without any respite. This will endure for forty days. This has been narrated from ʿAlī, Ibn ʿAbbās, and al-Ḥasan.

Author's comments: It has been narrated from them in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, and also from Ḥudhayfah b. al-Yamān and Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, from the Prophet. It has also been narrated from Ibn ʿUmar without a complete chain (*mawqūf*).

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says about this verse (44:10):
That is when they come forth from their graves during the *rajʿah*. Everyone will be shrouded in darkness. They will say: "This is a painful punishment. Our Lord! Remove from us this punishment. Indeed we have believed!"

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Zurārah b. Aʿyan narrates from Abū ʿAbd Allāh:
[Imām al-Ṣādiq] said: "The heavens wept for John the Baptist and Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī for forty nights."
I asked: "How do they weep?"
He said: "They would be red at sunrise and sunset."

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim relates from ʿUbayd al-Maktab, from Ibrāhīm:
"The heavens did not weep for anyone since the world began except two."
Someone asked ʿUbayd: "Don't the heavens weep for the believer?"
He said: "That is where he stood in prayer and the way through which his deeds ascended. Do you know how they weep?"
They said: "No."
He said: "They redden and become pink, as though painted. When John the Baptist was slain, the skies turned red and rained blood. And on the day Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī was slain, they turned red as well."

(5) In *Man Lā Yaḥḍaruh al-Faqīh* it is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq:
When the believer dies, the spot of ground on which he used to worship God weeps for him, and so does the gate in the heavens through which his deeds used to ascend, and his place of

prostration as well.

Author's comments: There are traditions to this effect, and to the effect of the previous two narrations, narrated through both Sunni and Shiʿi routes of transmission. And to interpret the weeping of the heavens and earth according to these traditions, there is no need to treat their weeping as something symbolic or imaginary.

(6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says about the verse: *and said, "A tutored madman?"* (44:14):

They said that because God's Messenger would become faint-like when the revelation came down to him, so they would say: "He is a madman."

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Verses 34–59

So far, the sūrah has warned the audience of punishment in this world and punishment in the Hereafter. Then it provided them an example of worldly punishment in the form of Pharaoh and his people when Moses brought them a message from his Lord and they denied him, causing God to drown them and wipe them out.

Now the discourse turns to the punishment of the Hereafter. First, it deals with people's denial of the Resurrection and their claim that there is no life after death, adducing proofs for the Resurrection. Then, it reveals some details about the punishment that awaits the guilty in the Hereafter, and some details about the everlasting rewards that await the Godwary. And with that, the *sūrah* concludes as it began, by mentioning that the Book was sent down to remind people and commanding the Prophet to wait.

إِنَّ هَٰؤُلَاءِ لَيَقُولُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾ إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا مَوْتَتُنَا الْأُولَىٰ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُنْشَرِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(44:34–35) ***Indeed these ones say, "It will be just our first death, and we shall not be brought forth.***

This goes back to the previous discussion when God said: *Rather they play around in doubt* (44:9). *These ones* refers to the Quraysh and the other Arab idolaters who deny the Resurrection with them. When they say *It will be just our first death*, they mean to negate any life after death which, logically, means that there will be no resurrection either. This is why next they say: *and we shall not be brought forth*, that is, resurrected. In *Kashshāf*, it is said: "God shall bring forth the dead, and that is their resurrection."

And when they say *It will be just our first death*, "it" refers to their fate and ultimate end. In other words: "Our ultimate fate and the end of our existence will only be our first death, whereat we will cease to exist. We will never live again after that."

It is said: When they say it is their *first* death, this does not imply they believe that there will be a second one. It is possible for something to be the first without there being any other after it.

There is, however, another interpretation offered by Zamakhsharī in

Kashshāf. He says:

> If you said: This discussion is about the afterlife, not death. Shouldn't it read: "It will just be our first life, and we shall not be brought forth", just as they say: *There is nothing but our life of this world, and we shall not be resurrected* (6:29)? What does it mean when God says: *It will be just our first death*? And what does it being *first* means? It is as though they have been promised a second death for them to reject it and affirm only the first one.

Author's comment: It means—and God grants success in hitting the mark—that they were told: "You will die a death which shall be followed by a life, just as death preceded your life now. That is God's saying: *…you were lifeless and He gave you life, then He will make you die, and then He shall bring you to life…* (2:28). In response, they said: "*It will be just our first death*." By this, they meant that the only death that shall follow life is the first death, not the second one, so this description which you give to death—namely that life follows it—only applies to the first death. So there is no difference in meaning between this and their saying, "*There is nothing but our life of this world*."

Perhaps there is a third interpretation for these words. Namely, that they said "*It will be just our first death*" after hearing the verse *They will say, "Our Lord! Twice did You make us die, and twice did You give us life. We admit our sins. Is there any way out*?" (40:11) When he commented on this verse, we said that the first death was the death that came after the life of this world, while the second death was the death at the end of life in *barzakh*. So when they say "*It will be just our first death*", they are actually denying the second death that accompanies the life in *barzakh*, which is life after death. This is because they see the death of the human being as the end of his existence and the utter annihilation of his being.

A fourth interpretation is that the word *first* is not actually part of their own speech, but God explaining what they mean. Instead, the verse reads: *Indeed these ones say "It will be just our death", the first…* meaning: "These people deny the afterlife and say: '*It will be just our death*' by which they mean the first of the two deaths We mentioned in Our words: '*Our Lord! Twice did You make us die…*.'"

These four interpretations differ in their proximity to what we understand; the third is the nearest, followed by the fourth and the first.

فَأْتُوا بِآبَائِنَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(44:36) ***Bring our fathers back, should you be truthful."***

This is the remainder of what the disbelievers said. They address it to the Prophet and those who believe in him because they were telling them about the Resurrection and Afterlife, so the disbelievers argued against life after death by saying: "*Bring our fathers back, should you be truthful*." In other words: "Let Him resurrect our deceased forefathers by your supplications or any means you choose that we might know the veracity of your claims that the dead will live again and that death is not the end of our existence."

أَهُمْ خَيْرٌ أَمْ قَوْمُ تُبَّعٍ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(44:37) ***Are they better, or the people of* Tubbaʿ*, and those who were before them? We destroyed them; indeed they were guilty.***

This is a threat to destroy them as He destroyed the people of Tubbaʿ and other communities who came before them.

Tubbaʿ was a king of Ḥimyar in Yemen. According to what has been said, his name was Asʿad Abū Karb or Saʿd Abū Karb. We shall look at some accounts about him in the discussion of narrations, below. There is a hint here that Tubbaʿ himself was spared destruction.

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَاعِبِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾ مَا خَلَقْنَاهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(44:38–39) ***We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them for play. We did not create them except with truth; but most of them do not know.***

Between them (baynahumā) is in the dual because it refers to the two categories of the heavens and the earth, which is why the plural is not employed here. The *bāʾ* in *with truth* (bi al-ḥaqq) is to signify concomitance, meaning: "We did not create them except that they were surrounded by the truth." Some commentators have suggested its meaning is causal, meaning: "We did not create them except for any reason except that of the truth, which is faith, obedience, resurrection and recompense." Clearly this meaning is far-fetched.

The implication of these two verses is a rational proof to affirm the Resurrection. To set it out fully: If there was nothing subsistent or enduring beyond this physical world, and God was continually bringing things into and out of existence again and again—giving life to this person and causing that one to die, then giving life to another, and so on and so forth—then everything He did would be mere pointless play. But it is impossible to ascribe play to God because all His actions are directed towards a proper goal. This means there must be another world that endures beyond this one to which all things journey. This fleeting, material world we live in is merely a stepping stone on the way to that higher world, which is the life of the Hereafter.

We have discussed this argument in detail in our commentary on verse sixteen of Sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ and verse twenty-seven of Sūrah Ṣād, to which those interested can refer.

…but most of them do not know: This rebukes them for their ignorance.

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ مِيقَاتُهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(44:40) ***Indeed the Day of Separation is the tryst for them all.***

This expounds a description of the day whose existence the above argument proved, namely the Day of Resurrection in which people will stand before the Lord of the Worlds.

God calls it the Day of Separation (*yawm al-faṣl*) because on that day He will separate truth from falsehood, the people of truth from the people of falsehood, and the Godwary from the guilty. Either that, or because it is the day of His decisive judgement (*al-qaḍāʾ al-faṣl*).

…the tryst for them all means that it is an appointed time for all people, or the time when the aforementioned people—the peoples of Tubbaʿ, those of Pharaoh, the Quraysh and others—will meet.

يَوْمَ لَا يُغْنِي مَوْلًى عَنْ مَوْلًى شَيْئًا وَلَا هُمْ يُنْصَرُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(44:41) ***The day when a* mawlā *will not avail a* mawlā *in any way, nor will they be helped,***

This explains the Day of Separation. *Mawlā* means either one companion who has the right to involve himself in the affairs of another; it refers to both the one who takes charge of the affairs and the one whose affairs are taken charge of. In this verse, the first instance of *mawlā* refers

to the former meaning and the second instance to the latter. So, first of all, the verse negates that a *mawlā* availing his *mawlā* in any way on that day. Secondly, it says that they will not be helped. The difference between these two meanings is that "to avail someone" is when the one who avails can act unilaterally, such that the person he avails has no role in the matter. On the other hand, "to help someone" means when the person being helped has some means at his disposal that (albeit that are insufficient for the task), and the person helping him is complementing these with his own (so that together they are sufficient for the task).

The reason no one will be able to avail or help another on that day is because those means of recourse that were effective in this world will be rendered impotent on the Day of Resurrection. God says: *all their means of recourse will be cut off* (2:166). And He says: *Then We shall set them apart from one another* (10:28).

إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ اللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٤٢﴾

(44:42) *except for him on whom God has mercy. Indeed He is the All-mighty, the All-merciful.*

This exception follows the pronoun *they* at the end of the previous verse; *nor will they be helped*. This verse is one of the evidences for intercession (*shafāʿah*) on the Day of Resurrection, and we have discussed intercession at length in the first part of this work.

This is assuming that *they* at the end of the above verse refers to people in general, which is the apparent meaning of the verse.

However, if it actually refers to the faithless as some say, then this is a discontinuous exception and the meaning becomes: "But those on whom God has mercy, namely the Godwary, they have no need of a master to avail them or a helper to help them."

As for some of them who consider it possible that the exception is continuous with *mawlā*, this is obviously false based on what we have said above. This is because, as we said, "availing" only applies to a person who has no means of salvation at his disposal. Someone in this condition has no one to avail him without exception because intercession is a form of help (*nuṣrah*) that still requires the recipient to have some means of salvation, namely a religion that God is satisfied with, as we have discussed in our study of intercession. However, it can also be interpreted in another way, as we shall see when we discuss the narration of Shaḥḥām.

Indeed He is the All-mighty means He is the One who overcomes all others but cannot be overcome Himself, so there is no one who can stop Him from punishing those whom He desires to punish. …*the All-merciful* means that He pours out goodness upon whomsoever He wishes. The relation of these Divine Names to the content of this verse is obvious.

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إِنَّ شَجَرَتَ الزَّقُّومِ ﴿٤٣﴾ طَعَامُ الْأَثِيمِ ﴿٤٤﴾

(44:43–44) ***Indeed the tree of* Zaqqūm *will be the food of the sinful.***

We have already discussed the tree of Zaqqūm in our commentary on Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt. The sinful (*athīm*) is one in whom sin (*ithm*) inheres, whether through sinning continuously or through sinning abundantly. These eight verses describe the condition of the inhabitants of hell.

كَالْمُهْلِ يَغْلِي فِي الْبُطُونِ ﴿٤٥﴾ كَغَلْيِ الْحَمِيمِ ﴿٤٦﴾

(44:45–46) ***Like molten copper, it will boil in the bellies like boiling water.***

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Molten copper (muhl) is the melted form of copper, although it could refer to other metals such as lead too. The meaning of *boil* is obvious, and *boiling water* (ḥamīm) means water of extreme temperature. *Like molten copper* is a second predicate for the particle *indeed* (inna) in the previous verse, whereas *the food of the sinful* is the first predicate. *It will boil in the bellies like boiling water* is the third predicate. The meaning of this sentence is apparent.

خُذُوهُ فَاعْتِلُوهُ إِلَىٰ سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٤٧﴾

(44:47) ***"Seize him and drag him to the midst of hell,***

"To drag" (*iʿtilāʾ*) means to shake and push violently, and *the midst of hell* is its middle. This is addressed to the angels responsible for hellfire. In other words, the verse means: "We will tell the angels: 'Take the sinner and drag him to the middle of hellfire so that it surrounds him!'" Elsewhere, God says: *and indeed hell besieges the faithless* (9:49).

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ثُمَّ صُبُّوا فَوْقَ رَأْسِهِ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْحَمِيمِ ﴿٤٨﴾

(44:48) ***then pour over his head the punishment of boiling water."***

The meaning of *punishment* here is that which is used to punish, and it is added to *boiling water* here to clarify what kind of punishment is meant. So the verse means: "Then pour the boiling water that is used for punishment over his head."

ذُقْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْكَرِيمُ ﴿٤٩﴾

(44:49) ***"Taste! Indeed you are the mighty and noble!"***

This is addressed to the sinner as he suffers one punishment after another. He is called "mighty" and "noble", despite his obvious humiliation and abasement, mockingly to intensify the punishment, because in this world he saw himself as being inherently mighty and noble. This is apparent from God's saying: *I do not think the Hour will ever set in, and in case I am returned to my Lord, I will indeed have the best with Him* (41:50).

إِنَّ هَٰذَا مَا كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تَمْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(44:50) ***"This is indeed what you used to doubt!"***

The verse continues from the previous one; as well as emphasizing its meaning, it also makes apparent their error in this world for doubting the reality of punishments they are themselves directly experiencing on that day! That is why God invokes the sense of taste for their experience of punishment, as this recalls the intense feelings of pain and pleasure experienced in their fullest sense.

Perhaps, as well, this could be read as a new segment of speech that is directed towards the faithless who are listening to the Qur'an after describing what their condition will be on the Day of Resurrection. This is potentially supported by the phrase *what you used to doubt* because the plural *you* is employed here while, in the previous verse, the command *taste!* employed the singular.

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي مَقَامٍ أَمِينٍ ﴿٥١﴾

(44:51) ***Indeed the Godwary will be in a secure station,***

A *station* (maqām) is where one stands firmly, which is why it is also interpreted to mean a place of residence (*iqāmah*). *Secure* (amīn) is an adjective derived from "safety" (*amn*), which carries the meaning of not being afflicted by hurt. So this verse means: "On the Day of Resurrection,

the Godwary will stand firm in a location safe from any harm."

From this we can see that attributing safety to a place by describing it as *secure* is a figurative attribution.

فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

(44:52) ***in gardens and springs,***

This explains the above phrase *in a secure station*. The verse says they will be *in* springs in the sense that they will be surrounded by them and the fact that they exist throughout the gardens that actually contain the Godwary. The plural form of *gardens* is used here to show either that there are many different varieties of garden, or that each of the Godwary shall have their own garden or gardens.

يَلْبَسُونَ مِنْ سُنْدُسٍ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(44:53) ***dressed in fine silk and brocade, sitting face to face.***

Both the Arabic words for *fine silk* (sundus) and *brocade* (istabraq) are Arabicized forms of Persian words.

Sitting face to face with one another because of their affability, because there is no evil or hurt from any of them as they are in a secure station.

كَذَٰلِكَ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُمْ بِحُورٍ عِينٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(44:54) ***So shall it be, and We shall wed them to black-eyed houris.***

In other words, it shall be as we have described it. *Wed them to black-eyed houris* means that we shall make them partners to them, because making one a partner (*qarīn*) is the original sense of *wed* (tazwīj) in Arabic. The word "houri" in English is a contraction of *ḥūr al-ʿīn*. The first part, *ḥūr*, is the plural of *hawrāʾ*, which means to have eyes whose black and white portions are intense in their colour, or to have a black eyeball. The second part, *ʿīn* is the plural of *ʿaynāʾ* which means to have large eyes. The apparent meaning of this verse is that the houris are not the same as the women of this world who enter paradise.

يَدْعُونَ فِيهَا بِكُلِّ فَاكِهَةٍ آمِنِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(44:55) ***There they will call for every fruit, in safety.***

In other words they are safe from any ill-effects of the fruit.

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا الْمَوْتَ إِلَّا الْمَوْتَةَ الْأُولَىٰ ۖ وَوَقَاهُمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٥٦﴾

(44:56) ***There they will not taste death except the first death, and He will guard them from the punishment of hell.***

This means that they live in paradise with eternal life and they shall never suffer death again.

A problem raised about this verse is that it says *they will not taste death except the first death*. The exception here implies that they will experience *the first death* while amongst gardens and springs. Of course, the intended meaning is precisely the opposite of this. Another reading is that *the first death* refers to death in this world, which has already passed for the People of Paradise. Now, it is impossible for something that has passed to return in the future, so what does it mean when God says they will not taste any death in future except *the first death*?

But there is yet another problem with this verse that commentators have not addressed, namely that God has already said: *Our Lord! Twice did You make us die, and twice did You give us life* (40:11). So between the life of this world and the Hour is not one but two deaths: the death in which a person moves from this world into *barzakh*, and the death in which the person moves from *barzakh* into the Hereafter. It appears that *the first death* in the present verse refers to the death people experience in this world when they journey to *barzakh*. So even if we resolve the problem with the exception *except the first death* in some way, what are we going to do about the second death that is not excepted from this statement? And what is the difference between them while they are two deaths that the Godwary will taste before they enter the eternal paradise?

I would answer the first problem by saying that this exception is discontinuous (*munqatiʿ*), meaning: "However, they have tasted the first death in this world and it has passed." This leaves the generality of the statement *there they will not taste death* intact.

But if we assume that this exception is not discontinuous, then we must read "except" (*illā*) as meaning "other than" (*siwā*), and the phrase *except the first death* is a permutation (*badal*) of *death* (from *they will not taste death*), which means no exception is actually being made. Instead, the verse means: "There they will not taste death, or any death besides the first death." As for the first death, they have already experienced it and

it is impossible for it to come back and be experienced again. And this interpretation is more fitting.

I could offer some alternate explanations, but these are unnecessary. You know well that nothing from these two explanations explains why it is called the first death, but we have discussed some explanations for this in our commentary on *It will be just our first death* (44:35).

As for the second problem, one could offer the second response we have just given above, namely that there are two deaths, the first of which transfers the human being from this world to *barzakh* and the second death transfers him from *barzakh* to the Hereafter. So, if *except* (illā) in *except the first death* actually means *other than* (siwā) and this phrase is a permutation of *death* in *they will not taste death*, the verse is laid out to negate a death besides the first death, namely the second death which is the death in *barzakh*; this means there is no death in paradise of the Hereafter, whether the death of this world because it has already happened, nor any other kind of death, which is the death of *barzakh*. This also explains why one death is called *the first*.

…and He will guard them from the punishment of hell. "To guard" (*wiqāyah*) means to protect something from anything that would cause it harm or distress, so this means He will protect them from the punishment of hell. He mentions guarding them against hell's punishment at the same time as saying they will not suffer death to make sure that this covers all forms of hurt. In other words, they are protected from being moved from one abode to another, and from the creation of paradise to another creation, which is death; and they are protected from being moved from a state of happiness to a state of misery, which is the punishment of hell.

فَضْلًا مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٥٧﴾

(44:57) ***a grace from your Lord. That is the great success.***

A grace from your Lord is a circumstantial qualifier for all the blessings and nobility mentioned above. It could also be read as an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*), or a purposive object. In any case, it means that this is an act of divine generosity which is not something that God's servants could earn; there is nothing they could do to make them deserving of this from Him or force Him to reward them. For God is not subject to anyone's authority or judgement. This is only a promise to God's servant, and God keeps His promise. And we have explored the full meaning of

this in our previous discussions.

That is the great success: Success (*fawz*) means attaining one's goal. It is a *great* success because this is the ultimate source of happiness for the human being.

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(44:58) ***Indeed We have made it simple in your tongue, so that they may take admonition.***

This verse is a corollary of everything that has been said above, from the beginning of the sūrah until this point, and a summary thereof. To "make simple" means to make easy. *It*—the thing that has been made simple—refers to the Book, and *your tongue* means the language of the Prophet, which is Arabic. So the verse means: "We have only made the Qur'an easy"—meaning understanding its goals—"in Arabic in order that they"—meaning your people—"might take admonition." So this verse is very close in its meaning to what God says elsewhere: *We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason* (43:3).

It is said: By making the Book simple in the Prophet's tongue, it means by having him speak it upon his tongue, whilst he is illiterate and unable to read and write, as a sign of the veracity of his claim to be a prophet. But this is very far from the context of this summing-up.

فَارْتَقِبْ إِنَّهُمْ مُرْتَقِبُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(44:59) ***So wait! Indeed they are waiting.***

This reads as though it is, like the verse before, a corollary of what has been said in this sūrah. Together, they mean: "We made it simple in Arabic that they might take admonition but they did not, rather they play around in doubt and await a punishment which cannot be averted by the deniers. So await their punishment, they too are awaiting it."

God says they are *waiting* as a form of derision. One of the nonsensical interpretations of this verse is that it is a command for the Prophet to leave them alone that was abrogated by the Sword Verse.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, about the words: *Are they better, or the people of Tubbaᶜ* (43:37), it is narrated from Sahl b. Sāᶜid, from the

Prophet:

Do not revile Tubbaʿ, for he had submitted to God.

Author's comments: A tradition to the same effect is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, from Ibn ʿAbbās; and also from Ibn ʿAsākir, from Ibn ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ, from the Prophet.

(2) Also about these words, it is narrated from al-Walīd b. Ṣabīḥ, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh:

Tubbaʿ told the Aws and Khazraj tribes: "Come here until this Prophet comes out. Surely were I to see him, I would serve him and come out with him too."

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related by Abū Naʿīm in *al-Dalāʾil*, from ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām:

Tubbaʿ did not die before believing in the Prophet when the Jews of Yathrib informed him about him.

Author's comments: There are many traditions about Tubbaʿ, including some which say that he was the first king to cover the Kaʿbah with a cloth.

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, in a chain of narrators via Zayd al-Shaḥḥām:

While we were on the road on the eve of Friday, Abū ʿAbd Allāh said: "Recite, for indeed the eve of Friday is a recitation."

I recited the verses: *Indeed the Day of Separation is the tryst for them all, the day when a* mawlā *will not avail a* mawlā *in any way, nor will they be helped, except for him on whom God has mercy. Indeed He is the All-mighty, the All-merciful* (44:40–42).

Then he said: "By God, it is we whom God has excepted, for it is we who would avail them."

Author's comments: He is alluding to intercession and has joined the exception to the first *mawlā* in the verse.

(5) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:

Indeed the tree of Zaqqūm will be the food of the sinful. This was revealed about Abū Jahl b. Hishām, and the words *like molten copper* means copper that has been melted. *Like molten copper it will boil in the bellies, boiling like boiling water* (44:43–46) is water which is hot to the utmost extreme.

Author's comments: There are narrations from Sunni sources which affirm that these verses were revealed about Abū Jahl.

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Chapter 45

Sūrah al-Jāthiyah

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Verses 1–13

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

The purpose of this sūrah is a general call in the form of a warning. It begins by mentioning the signs of God's oneness, before the promulgation of a divine code (*sharīʿah*) for the Prophet. Then it emphasizes the importance of following this code for him and others because ahead of them lies a day on which they will be recompensed for their righteous deeds—such as having faith and following the Prophet's teachings—and they will only hurt themselves with evil deeds if they turn away from the religion. Finally, it mentions what will become of both groups on that day, namely the Day of Resurrection.

Throughout its topics, there is a severe warning and threat of punishment for those who arrogantly defy God's signs, and those who take their own desires as gods, and whom God misguides upon knowledge.

One of the most fascinating subjects discussed in this sūrah is how deeds are written down and recorded.

Based on the tone and content of its verses, this is a Meccan sūrah, although some commentators made an exception for the verse *Say to the faithful…* (45:14). However, there is nothing to attest to their opinion.

حم ﴿١﴾ تَنْزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

(45:1–2) ***Ḥā, Mīm. The sending down of the Book is from God, the All-mighty, All-wise.***

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The construct state (*iḍāfah*) in the second verse, *the sending down of the Book* (*tanzīl al-kitāb*), is one wherein an adjective (the first element) is linked to its noun (the second element). This adjective takes the form of a verbal noun (*maṣdar*), but its meaning is that of a passive participle (*ism*

mafʿūl). *From God* is connected to *sending down* (tanzīl), and the entire phrase is a predicate for an implicit subject (*mubtadaʾ*).

The meaning of this verse is: "This is a book sent down from God, the All-mighty, the All-wise." And we have discussed the meaning of its vocabulary previously.

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إِنَّ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾

(45:3) *Indeed in the heavens and the earth there are signs for the faithful.*

The sign (*āyah*) of a thing is a marker that points and guides towards it. When God says that the heavens and the earth contain signs, this means that they themselves are His signs, for there is nothing beyond the heavens, the earth and everything that God has created that contains all of them which is a sign that points to Him.

What we have just said is evinced by the different expressions God uses for this in His speech; sometimes he says that there is a sign "in"(*fī*) something, while at others He counts the thing itself as a sign. For example, He says: *Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs…* (3:190). But, at the same time, He says elsewhere: *Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth…* (30:22). From the different expressions found in these verses and the many others like them, we can deduce that when something has a sign in it, this means it itself is a sign. This is just as we understand from the verses *Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs…* and *Indeed in the heavens and the earth there are signs for the faithful* that *the creation of the heavens and the earth* (khalq al-samawāt wa al-arḍ) means the heavens and the earth themselves, not something else.

When God says that something contains a sign while it itself is a sign, His concern is with the different facets of its existence (*jihāt wujūdihi*). If something has one or more facets to its existence, then each of these facets is a sign in its own right. But were we to take the thing itself into consideration, we could only take it as a single sign. This is as God says: *In the earth are signs for those who have conviction* (51:20), whereas if the sign was the earth itself, He could only say: "The earth is a sign for those who have conviction." In this case we would lose the deeper meaning of the verse, namely that the earth has multiple facets of its existence, and

each of these facets is a sign in its own right.

So the words …*in the heavens and the earth there are signs*… mean that there are many facets to the existence of the heavens and the earth, all of which point to God alone being their creator and governor, without any partner. This is because they have an essential need (*ḥājah dhātiyyah*) for someone to bring them into being; they need someone to give them their awesome creation, their wondrous composition, to connect the different parts of their being, to unite them in their astounding multiplicity, and to subsume each of their particular natural orders under a single, unifying cosmic order to govern them. All of this demonstrates that they have a creator and that He alone is their governing Lord. For, were there not someone there to originally bring them into being, and were they not governed by a single Lord, their arrangement would have been filled with contradictions and conflicts.

From the above, it should be clear that what some commentators have said, namely that *in the heavens* has an implicit construct state with the meaning *in the* creation of *the heavens* is an unnecessarily tortuous reading of the text.

وَفِي خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُثُّ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ آيَاتٌ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ۝٤

(45:4) ***And in your creation and whatever animals that He scatters, there are signs for a people who have certainty.***

To "scatter" (*baththh*) is to spread out and stir up, and His "scattering" the animals means to create them, separate them, and spread them across the world, as God says about the creation of the human being: …*then, behold, you are humans scattering!* (30:20).

The meaning of the verse is: "And in you, *qua* your created existence, and in those animals God distributes, *qua* their creation, are surely signs for a people who travel upon the path of certainty."

And the creation of the human being, insofar as he is a terrestrial being who is connected to matter, is different kind of creation to that of the heavens and the earth. This is because he is the combination of a terrestrial body that is made up of matter and will decompose into dust when he dies, with something else beyond that; something transcendent and immaterial that not only survives death but will be received and kept safe with God. This other element is what the Qur'an calls the spirit: …*and breathed into him of My spirit*… (15:29). And, after mentioning the creation

of the human being from semen (*nuṭfah*), then from a clot (*ʿalaqah*), then from a chewed substance (*muḍghah*), then the completion of his body's creation, God says: *Then We produced him as another creature* (23:14) and: *Say: "You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you…"* (32:11).

So when one considers the creation of the human being one is considering not only the signs in his terrestrial existence, but also those in his astral existence (*malakūtiyyah*) that lies beyond this. In the same vein, one who considers the creation of animals—and animals are endowed with living, feeling souls, even if these are of a lower degree to those of human souls, just as their physical abilities are beneath that of a human—all of these contain signs for people of certitude, by which people can know God, and know that He is one and without any partner in his lordship or divinity.

وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ رِزْقٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَاحِ آيَاتٌ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ۝٥

(45:5) ***And in the alternation of night and day… for a people who apply reason.***

These kinds of signs fall into the category of signs that exist between the heavens and the earth.

And in the alternation of night and day… meaning their alternation in becoming longer and shorter, which is part of the natural order and runs in tandem with the changing of the seasons in different parts of the world, repeating with the repetition of the years. In this way, God arranges the means of sustenance for the earth's inhabitants and gives them a proper education. He says: *and ordained therein its means of sustenance in four days, alike for all the seekers* (41:10).

…and what God sends down from the heavens of provision with which He revives the earth after its death….

The provision (*rizq*) which God sends down from the heavens means rain. Here, he either uses the word "provision" for rain figuratively, giving the cause (rain) the name of the thing it causes (provision), or because rain is also a form of provision, as the waters of the earth originate as rain. *Heavens* here is used figuratively to refer to the sky or clouds. *Revive the earth after its death* means reviving the plants it contains by causing

them to grow. And invoking this image of life after death is a subtle allusion to the Resurrection.

…and in the disposal of the winds… means changing them and sending from one direction to another; their disposal carries many general benefits; one of the most general of these is carrying clouds to different parts of the world, pollinating plants, and carrying away unpleasant airs.

…there are signs for a people who apply reason meaning those people who distinguish between truth and falsehood and between right and wrong using their God-given intellects.

And each of these categories of signs are directed to a specific group of people; the signs of the heavens and the earth are directed to those who believe; the signs of the human being and all other animals are directed to those who have certainty; while the signs of night and day, and rains and wind are directed to those who apply reason. Perhaps the reason for this is that the signs of the heavens and the earth offer simple straightforward guidance that they did not bring themselves into being, nor did they come about by coincidence or chance, rather they have an originator who brought them into being, and all the causes and activities which produce the visible natural order. Therefore their creator must be the creator of everything and the lord of all. Any human being can grasp that, even with the simplest mind; so all levels of the faithful understand this and benefit from it.

Meanwhile, as for the signs in God's creation of the human being and all living, sensing creatures, they are—at least from the aspect of their living and sensing souls—from a realm beyond that of matter, and this is called the realm of dominion (*malakūt*). The Qur'an restricts the comprehension and perception of this to the people of certainty, as it says: *Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude* (6:75).

As for the signs of the alternation of night and day, the rains that revive the earth and the disposal of the winds; because of their variety, their multifacetedness, their connection to the earth and terrestrial realities, their abundant benefits and the breadth of their value, they require deep and meticulous contemplation. Such contemplation cannot be grasped by simple minds, which is why God says that these are only for people who apply reason. God's signs are signs for all people, but insofar as only some of them benefit from these signs, God says that they are for them.

God describes the people of certainty and those of reason as *a people who have certainty* (qawmun yūqinūn) and *a people who apply reason* (qawmun yaʿqilūn), while he describes the people of belief as *the faithful* (muʾminīn). This is because the simplicity of the sign given to the people of belief suggests that what is meant by belief is its basis, which is already fixed in them (so they do not need to do anything). Hence it is fitting to describe them with the adjective *faithful*, unlike the next two groups of people. On the other hand, the people of certitude and reason, because of their meticulousness and intellectual abilities, grasp things stage-by-stage, hence it is more fitting to describe them with an imperfect verb to signify an ongoing process of reflection.

It is said: The arrangement of the three groups of people in these three verses, beginning with the people of belief, then the people of certainty, then the people of reason, follows the stages by which a person ascends in his understanding. Certainty is a specific level of belief; it is the utmost limit of belief. Meanwhile, reason is the axis of both belief and certainty. By reason, we mean human reason that is aided by the illumination of insight, by which certainty is freed from all kinds of doubt and in whose strengthening every good thing is found. The arrangement of the three verses follows that of these three levels.[1]

However, according to what this interpretation says about reason, the Qur'an should have mentioned it before either of the other two levels, as—by definition—it is inconceivable that certainty should be affected by doubts.

It is also said about the arrangement: In order to consider the signs in the second verse fully, one must reflect on the signs in the first. This is because the heavens and the earth are two of the causes for the existence of animals, therefore they must be mentioned before it. The same applies to the signs of the third verse; to consider them fully one must consider both the first and second verse. As for the first verse, the reason is obvious. As for the second verse, it is because it is the final cause.[2] Therefore it must be comprehensive; in other words, the third verse must be read as an effect (*maʿlūl*) whose understanding depends on understanding its final cause mentioned in the verse before it.

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1 This interpretation is from Zamakhsarī in his *Kashshāf*, as is the next. The third is taken from Fakhr al-Rāzī in his *Tafsīr Kabīr*.

2 That is, the reason for which a thing is caused. [Trans.]

However, even if this explains why the signs have been arranged in this order, it does not explain why the three qualities have been associated with them; meaning faith, certainty, and reason. Moreover, is the third group of signs not, like the first, one of the causes for the existence of animals? Therefore it should have come before the second. Alternatively, is not the second group of signs the final cause for the first? In which case should it not have come before it, just as it came before the third?

It is said: The reason for the arrangement of these categories means to say: If you are faithful, then think about these signs. But if you are not faithful and you are looking for certainty and knowledge, then think about these signs. And if you are neither faithful nor certain, then strive to comprehend these signs.

However, even if this explains the arrangement of the three qualities but it does not explain the arrangement of the three sets of signs. Moreover, its logical corollary is that none of these three sets of signs should be restricted to just one of these qualities. Instead, all the signs should be for all of these people, and the context does not support this understanding. Furthermore, he appears to have interpreted certainty as being equivalent to knowledge, which leaves reason has no role to play except in speculative knowledge (*ʿilm ẓannī*), and this kind of knowledge is inadmissible in matters of belief!

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ ۖ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَ اللَّهِ وَآيَاتِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾

(45:6) ***These are the signs of God that We recite for you in truth. So what discourse will they believe after God and His signs?***

"Belief" (*īmān*) in something means to know something and adhere to it in practice; if someone does not adhere to something then it is not belief, even if knowledge is there. God says: *They impugned them although they were convinced in their hearts* (27:14), and: *…and whom God has led astray upon knowledge…* (45:23).

Recall that signs (*ayāt*) are guideposts, so God's cosmic signs are cosmic phenomena whose objective existence points to God being solitary in creation, endowed with the attributes of perfection, and divested of all need or deficiency. Believing in these signs means believing that they point to Him, and the logical consequence of believing in them is believing

Him to be as they indicate.

On the other hand, Qur'anic signs are signs of his that point to the cosmic signs leading to Him, to lessons of doctrine, to practical laws or to moral qualities that God is pleased with and enjoins upon people. Their contents point to him and are from him; so believing in these signs also means believing that they point to something, which in turn necessitates belief in that to which they point.

As for signs in the form of miracles (*muʿjizāt*), these too are either cosmic signs who point in the same way as cosmic signs, or they are non-cosmic signs. For example, the Qur'an's miraculous inimitability and its pointing to the significance of the cosmic signs is not itself a cosmic sign.

These are the signs of God that We recite for you in truth refers to the signs of the Qur'an that are recited to him. It could also refer to the cosmic signs that God mentions in the three above verses, intending to unify both the signifier and the signified therein.

So what discourse will they believe after God and His signs?

It is said: This is like you saying: "Zayd and his nobility amazed me" and "You can only be amazed by his nobility!" Looking carefully, this means "Zayd's nobility amazed me, as did Zayd with regard to his nobility." So the meaning of the verse is: "What discourse after these signs of God—meaning the signs in the Qur'an—will they believe in?" In other words: "If they will not believe in this discourse, then what other discourse could they believe in?"

It is said: *Discourse* means God's speech, so the meaning is: "If they will not believe, then in what discourse after God's speech and His signs, will they believe?" But if this was the meaning, it would be more fitting for *signs* to mean the cosmic signs, which is why Ṭabrisī says after mentioning this reading: "The difference between the discourse of the Qur'an and its signs is that its discourse are stories taken from it in the course of distinguishing truth (*ḥaqq*) from falsehood (*bāṭil*), while its signs are its proofs that separate correct (*ṣaḥīḥ*) from incorrect (*fāsid*)."

But the first of these two interpretations is finer.

وَيْلٌ لِكُلِّ أَفَّاكٍ أَثِيمٍ ۝٧

(45:7) ***Woe to every sinful liar.***

Woe means "perish!"

The word used here for *liar* (affāk) is in the intensive noun form (*ṣīghat*

al-mubālaghah), meaning "one who is addicted to lying." *Sinful* (athīm) means one who commits sins. So the meaning of the verse is: "Let every sinning liar perish!"

يَسْمَعُ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ ثُمَّ يُصِرُّ مُسْتَكْبِرًا كَأَنْ لَمْ يَسْمَعْهَا ۖ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٨﴾

(45:8) ***who hears the signs of God being recited to him then persists disdainfully, as if he had not heard them. So inform him of a painful punishment.***

This sentence is an adjective for *sinful liar*, above. *Then* (thumma) is used here for a sequence in order (not time) and gives a sense of distance. To "persist" (*iṣrār*) in doing something means to keep it and not give it up.

So the meaning is: He heard God's signs—the verses of the Qur'an—being recited to him, but he still clings to faithlessness; in fact, he is arrogant and will not humble himself before the truth, as if he has not heard those verses. So inform him of a painful punishment.

وَإِذَا عَلِمَ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا شَيْئًا اتَّخَذَهَا هُزُوًا ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿٩﴾

(45:9) ***Should he learn anything about Our signs, he takes them in derision. For these there is a humiliating punishment.***

Judging from the context, it appears that *them* refers to the signs. By connecting *in derision* is to *signs* rather than what he has learnt about them, this emphasizes his utter ignorance thereof.

The verse means: "And when that sinful liar who persists in his disdain learns anything about Our signs, he derides them all."

For these there is a humiliating punishment: In other words, they will suffer abasement and disgrace. The punishment is described as *humiliating* in response to their arrogance and derision. *These* (ulāʾika) is employed here to refer to *every sinful liar.* It is said that there are other interpretations of this verse, but we have omitted these because there is no benefit to discussing them.

مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَلَا يُغْنِي عَنْهُمْ مَا كَسَبُوا شَيْئًا وَلَا مَا اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

(45:10) ***Behind them is hell, and what they have earned will not avail them anything, nor what they had taken as guardians besides God and there is a great punishment for them.***

In that they are so preoccupied with this world that they turn away from the truth and pay no attention to the consequences of their actions, Hell is put *behind* them, even though they are heading straight for it and facing its direction.

It is said: *Behind them* means in front of them. *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says: "*Behind* (warāʾ) is a noun that can be used to mean either in front or behind. Whatever is beyond you is *behind* you, whether it is behind you or in front of you."

And when God says *behind them is hell*, this is a foreordained decree.

…and what they have earned will not avail them anything: *What they have earned* means what wealth and the like thereof they have obtained in this world. *Anything* is left indefinite to belittle it, meaning: "None of the wealth, rank or supporters they garnered in this world will help them in the slightest bit on the Day of Judgement."

…nor what they had taken as guardians besides God: *Guardians* refers to the deities of the idols which they took as lords and gods in this world and claimed that they would intercede for them, or it refers to the idols themselves.

…and there is a great punishment for them: This reaffirms the threat of the punishment that awaits them. This threat was first made in the verse: *Woe to every sinful liar*, second in the verse: *so inform him of a painful punishment*, third in the verse: *For these there is a humiliating punishment,* fourth in the verse: *Behind them is hell*, and fifth in this verse just now. Throughout these verses the punishment is described as painful, humiliating, and great.

هَٰذَا هُدًى ۖ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِنْ رِجْزٍ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

(45:11) ***This is a guidance, and as for those who defy the signs of their Lord, for them is a painful punishment due to defilement.***

This refers to the Qur'an. It is described as *a guidance* for hyperbole, as when we say "Zayd is justice." *Defilement*—as has been said—is the most severe kind of punishment, and its original meaning is confusion.

This verse should be read in the context of repudiating the aspersions

cast upon the Qur'an by the faithless, considering it worthy of derision and mockery. In short, however, it is a warning for those who reject its signs.

اللَّهُ الَّذِى سَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْبَحْرَ لِتَجْرِىَ الْفُلْكُ فِيهِ بِأَمْرِهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(45:12) ***It is God who disposed the sea for you so that the ships may sail in it by His command.***

Having mentioned the condition of those who lie out of disdain for faith, deride the signs that are recited to them and mock what they know of them, and warned them in the most forceful way of a punishment most severe, God now turns away from them to address all people: believers and disbelievers. He mentions some of the signs of His lordship, of which some are too magnificent for them to deny. He begins by describing how He disposed the sea for them, then all the contents of the heavens and the earth, which contain signs no one can deny unless they have left their very humanity behind and forgotten how to think—and thinking is the most magnificent trait of the human being.

For you in *it is God who disposed the sea for you* indicates purpose; in other words, He disposed the sea for your sake, in a way that ships could float and travel upon it so that people could benefit thereby. It is also possible that *for you* could signify transitiveness, in the sense that man tamed the seas by God's leave.

…so that the ships may sail in it by His command… explains the reason why He disposed the sea; ships sailing by His command means that He created sailing with the creative command: "Be!" (*kun!*). This is because the properties of things, like things themselves, are attributed to Him.

…and that you may seek of His grace… means so that by riding upon ships you could seek His grace, meaning His sustenance.

…and that you may give thanks—meaning in order that you might give thanks to God in return for this blessing, namely His subduing the sea for you.

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِى الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مِنْهُ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(45:13) ***And He has disposed for you whatever is in the heavens***

and whatever is on the earth; all is from Him. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect.

This verse progresses from the last by linking a more general statement to a more particular one. *For you* is exactly like *for you* in the previous verse. *All* is to emphasize that it includes everything in the heavens and the earth, or a circumstantial qualifier for *whatever*.

Disposing these for the human being means that the different parts of the visible world run according to a single natural order, which governs them, joins one part to another, and joins all of them to the human being. This allows the human being to benefit from them in his life, whether they are great or small. Human civilization is continuously finding new ways to benefit through this order and use it to attain a better standard of living. This is because it is all at his disposal.

From means "originating with" and *Him* refers to God. This is a circumstantial qualifier for *whatever is in the heavens and the earth.*

The verse means: "He has disposed for you whatever is in the heavens and the earth altogether, while it has originated from Him and comes from Him." The essences of things originate with Him when He brings them into being without any prior precedent for them. The same is true of their properties and qualities, which He creates in them. One such property or quality is that they are connected to one another, and this is the natural order which is connected to the human being. God says: *God originates the creation, then He will bring it back* (30:11). And He says: *It is indeed He who originates and brings back* (85:13).

Commentators have mentioned other meanings for *from Him* but all of them entail rather tortuous readings of the text. For this reason, we have omitted them.

There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect: The connection between the above and reflection (*tafakkur*) is obvious.

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Verses 14–19

The above verses mentioned the signs of God's oneness, and subtly alluded to both the Resurrection and prophethood in the course of mentioning the sending down of the Book and the bringing back of those arrogant enough to deride it to be punished. Now, the *sūrah* turns to the promulgation of the Divine Code (*sharīʿah*) for the Prophet. It begins by adducing two premises that connect it to what has already been said so far. The first of these is inviting the faithful to overlook the condition of the faithless who do not expect God's days, for God will requite them when they are held responsible for their deeds, whether virtuous or vicious. This is the reason for which God promulgated a divine code. The second premise is that sending down the Book, judgement and prophethood is not something unprecedented; God gave the Israelites the Book, judgement and prophethood too, and He gave them manifest signs that would have left no one in doubt about in God's religion. But their scholars differed about it out of spite, and God will judge between them.

Then God turns to discuss the promulgation of the Divine Code for the Prophet and commands him to follow it while forbidding him from following the desires of the ignorant.

قُلْ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يَغْفِرُوا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ أَيَّامَ اللَّهِ لِيَجْزِيَ قَوْمًا بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(45:14) ***Say to the faithful to forgive those who do not expect God's days, that He may requite a people for what they used to earn.***

Here, God commands His Prophet to bid the faithful to forgive the faithless. Here the imperative *ighfirū* ("forgive!") has been replaced by *yaghfirū* ("to forgive"), in the same construction as we see in the verse: *Tell My servants who have faith to maintain (*yuqīmū*) the prayer and to spend out of what We have provided them with* (14:31).

This verse was revealed in Mecca as it fits with the context of the previous verses which describe the condition of those who disdain God's signs and mock them and threaten them with the severest of punishments.

This is because when those who believed in the Prophet saw these people, the latter would go to extremes insulting them, belittling the Prophet and mocking God's signs. The faithful could not stop themselves from trying to defend God's Book and the one with whom He sent it, as well as calling on the faithless to give up their own religion and believe in the truth. This was in spite of the fact that the word of punishment had been proclaimed against them, as is clear from the previous verses. It is for this reason that God told His Prophet to bid them to forgive and excuse the faithless, and pay no attention to their condition, because the burden of their deeds will catch up with them, and they will be repaid what they have earned in full.

With this in mind, *to forgive* means to excuse and ignore them by not engaging in arguments with them. *Who do not expect God's days* refers to those mentioned in the above verses, as they do not expect that there will be any days on which God will judge and hold authority, such as the day of a person's death, *barzakh*, Resurrection or the days on which he punishes people by wiping them out in this world.

…that He may requite a people for what they used to earn explains the rationale for the command to forgive (or the command to command them to forgive). Its essence is that they should forgive them and pay no attention to them, for there is no need to confront them as God will repay in full what they used to earn. This makes the verse similar in meaning to the verses:

Leave Me with the deniers, the opulent, and give them a little respite. Indeed with Us are heavy fetters and a fierce fire…. (73:11–12)

Then leave them to play around in their impious gossip. (6:91)

So leave them to gossip and play until they encounter their day, which they are promised (70:42)

So disregard them, and say, "Peace!" Soon they will know. (43:89)

So this verse means: "Tell those who believe to excuse and forgive those who arrogantly deride God's signs, who do not expect God's days, so that God may repay them what they used to earn in full." After all, the Day of Recompense is one of God's days. In other words: "Let them excuse those who deny God's days until they are requited for their deeds on one of these days!"

In *…that He may requite a people…*, God makes an explicit noun (*a people*) the object of a sentence instead of a pronoun ("them"), which would appear to be the more fitting expression. However, He has used *a people* in this way because it is indefinite and unqualified by any adjectives.

This belittles their affair and shows He has no concern, as if they are a group of deniers whom He does not know or have any concern for.

From the above, it is plain to see that this verse connects those that come after it with those before it. This answers the problems raised and addressed by some commentators, and demonstrates the falsity of the different meanings they have offered for it. Anyone interested to know their opinions can refer to the lengthier works.

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا ۖ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(45:15) ***Whoever acts righteously, it is for his own soul, and whoever does evil, it is to its own detriment, then you will be brought back to your Lord.***

This can be read as an explanation of the rationale for the above verse *…that He may requite a people…*, which is why this verse does not begin with *and…* or any indication that it is a new topic being discussed.

In short, it means: So that God will repay them for what they used to earn, for deeds do not just vanish or disappear without a trace. Rather, whoever acts righteously will benefit from it, and whoever does evil will come to harm because of it. Then you will go back to your Lord and He will repay you according to your deeds: good for good, evil for evil.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنُّبُوَّةَ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

(45:16) ***Certainly We gave the Children of Israel the Book, judgement and prophethood and We provided them with all the good things, and We gave them an advantage over all the nations.***

Having explained that deeds have good or bad effects that will come back to their doer, God wishes to call attention to the fact that He has given His Prophet a divine code. This is because it is God's responsibility to guide His servants to that which contains their propriety and happiness. Elsewhere, He says: *With God rests guidance to the straight path* (16:9).

He calls attention to this below, when He says: *Then We set you upon a clear course of the Law*. But he precedes this by speaking about the Israelites being given Book, judgement, and prophethood, as well as sustenance in the form of good things, and that they were blessed above all

other nations and given manifest signs. This is to show that the sacred effusion of a divine code, prophethood, and scripture is not something new or unprecedented. Rather, this is a continuation of what was given to the Israelites, and this was within their sight and hearing.

Certainly We gave the Children of Israel the Book, judgement and prophethood.: *The Book* means the Torah, which consisted of the teachings of Moses. As for the Evangel, it did not contain a new divine code; its divine code was that of the Torah. As for the Psalms of David, it consists of supplications and invocations. It is possible that *the Book* refers to scripture in general; including the Torah, the Psalms, and the Evangel, as some have suggested. However, this is unlikely because the Qur'an only uses the work "book" (*kitāb*) for scriptures that contain a divine code (*sharīʿah*).

As it has been mentioned alongside the Book, *judgement* refers to the rulings and edicts of the Book that are the duties of people to enact. God recalls elsewhere: *and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed* (2:213). And about the Torah, He said: *The prophets, who had submitted, judged by it for the Jews, and so did the rabbis and the scribes, as they were charged to preserve the Book of God* (5:44). So *judgement* is one of the corollaries of the Book (in the sense that it contains a divine code) just as prophethood is.

The meaning of *prophethood* is obvious, as God sent a multitude of prophets to the Israelites, of whom many accounts and stories are gathered in the Qur'an.

…and We provided them with all the good things: Meaning, a good provision: manna and quails.

…and We favoured them over the nations: If this refers to all nations, then this means they were given some advantages over them such as having so many prophets sent to them and the many clear miracles they performed for them. On the other hand, if this refers to the nations of their own times, then they were indeed favoured above them from all angles.

وَآتَيْنَاهُمْ بَيِّنَاتٍ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ ۖ فَمَا اخْتَلَفُوا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ
بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَقْضِي بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ
يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(45:17) ***And We gave them manifest signs from the matter. But***

they did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of spite among themselves. Indeed your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ:

Manifest signs means signs that remove all doubt and hesitation from the truth. This is attested to by the fact that to this God appends the phrase: *But they did not differ except after knowledge had come to them*.

It is said that *matter* (amr) refers to the matter of the Prophet and this means: We gave them manifest signs concerning the matter of the Prophet and clear indications of his truthfulness, such as his appearing in Mecca and emigrating to Yathrib, the support of the latter's people and other such things that are mentioned in their books.

But they did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of spite among themselves: This shows that the religious disagreements that erupted between them and the mixing of falsehood with truth that took place after their prophets was not due to any doubt or ignorance, but rather it was caused by their scholars out of spite, and this spite was reciprocated amongst themselves.

Indeed your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ: The verse goes on to say that their disagreements which have allowed falsehood to contaminate the truth will not be forgotten, but rather will have their effect; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection and recompense them as befits their behavior in this life.

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(45:18) ***Then We set you upon a clear course of the matter; so follow it, and do not follow the desires of those who do not know.***

This verse addresses the Prophet directly, but is also relevant to his community. *A clear course* (sharīʿah) means a path leading down to water, and *the matter* means the matter of religion. So this verse means: "After we gave the Israelites what we gave, we placed you upon a specific path in the matter of the divine religion" meaning the path of Islam, which God bestowed upon the Prophet and his community.

So follow it is a command to the Prophet to follow the religion as it has

been revealed to him and not to follow the desires of the ignorant which contradict the divine religion. From this verse it is clear, first of all, that (contrary to what some have claimed), the Prophet was expected to follow the religion just like everyone else. Second of all, it is clear that every practical rule that does not rest on divine revelation or go back to it is one of the desires of the ignorant that is not based on sound knowledge.

إِنَّهُمْ لَنْ يُغْنُوا عَنْكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا ۚ وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ
وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

(45:19) ***Indeed they will not avail you in any way against God. Indeed the wrongdoers are guardians of one another, but God is the guardian of the Godwary.***

This explains why God forbids him from following the desires of those without knowledge; "to avail" a thing means to remove (fulfil) its needs. In short, God says that you have essential needs that only God can fulfil, the way to fulfil these is following His religion and nothing else. Those people who follow their own desires will not avail you anything or fulfil any of your needs, or they will be of no benefit to you whatsoever!

Indeed the wrongdoers are guardians of one another, but God is the guardian of the Godwary: The context suggests that this is another explanation for the above prohibition against following the desires of the ignorant. Here *wrongdoers* mean those people who follow their own wayward desires, while *the Godwary* are those who follow God's religion.

This means that God is the guardian of those who follow His religion because they are the Godwary. He is not a guardian for those who follow the desires of the ignorant, rather they are guardians of one another. This is because wrongdoers are allies of one another. So follow God's religion in order that He be your guardian and do not follow their desires in order that they be your guardians, for they will not avail you anything against God.

Calling those who follow a religion other than that of God *wrongdoers* agrees with the implications of the verse: *May God's curse be on the wrongdoers! Those who bar from the way of God, and seek to make it crooked, and disbelieve in the Hereafter.* (7:44–45)

Verses 20–37

Above, God said that He had placed the Prophet on a clear path of the matter, which means He promulgated the divine code of Islam. In these verses he says that these are insights (*baṣāʾir*) for mankind through which they can perceive the path they must take in order to lead a good life in this world, and that will ultimately lead them to happiness in the Hereafter, and a guidance and a mercy for a people who have certainty about God's signs.

He also points out that the real reason why those who do evil deeds disdain following the clear path is because they deny the Resurrection. They think that they and those that follow the Religion are equal in life and death; they don't think that following the Religion will have any effect on their lives or that following the kind of righteous pattern of conduct prescribed by the Clear Path will yield anything except unnecessary effort. In response, God argues that their impressions are false by proving that the Resurrection will surely come to pass. He accompanies this with a description of the Resurrection, the rewards of the righteous on that day and what awaits the sinners who obstinately reject guidance and persist in wrongdoing. He concludes the *sūrah* with praise and glorification.

هَـٰذَا بَصَائِرُ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(45:20) ***This is insights for mankind, and guidance and mercy for a people who have certainty.***

This shows that *the matter* referred to above (45:19) is the religion of Islam or the Qur'an insofar as it contains its teachings. *Insights* (baṣāʾir), the plural of "insight" (*baṣīrah*), means a perception that corresponds to reality. Here, this refers to that by which a person can perceive. The Religion contains insights insofar as it contains laws and rules, each and every one of which guides people to what they must do in order to walk on the path of happiness.

So this verse means: "This is the clear path which has been laid down, or the Qur'an containing its practical duties, through each of which everyone can gain insight and be guided to the path of truth, which is the path of God and the path of happiness." And when, after mentioning laying

down this clear path, God says *This is insights for mankind*…, this is like when He says after mentioning the signs of His oneness at the beginning of the *sūrah*: *This is a guidance* (45:11).

…*and guidance and mercy for a people who have certainty* means that it is a clear direction and an overflowing of goodness upon them. *A people who have certainty* means those who have certainty about God's signs which point to the foundations of divine knowledge (*uṣūl al-maʿārif*), for in the language of the Qur'an, "having certainty" (*īqān*) is always connected to matters of belief and foundational doctrines.

The Qur'an singles people who have certainty out for guidance and mercy even though it says it contains insights for all mankind. This suggests that the meaning of "guidance" (*hudā*) is to arrive at one's destination rather than just to perceive it correctly, and that "mercy" (*raḥmah*) here refers to that mercy that is reserved for those who are Godwary and believe in His Messenger, having already believed in Him. God says: *O you who have faith! Be wary of God and have faith in His Messenger. He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by, and forgive you* (57:28); and He says: *This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the Godwary, who believe in the Unseen… and are certain of the Hereafter* (2:2–4). Divine mercy has many levels of varying breadth; even that mercy reserved for the people of faith has different degrees that vary according to the level of a person's faith. Each level of faith is matched by a level of divine mercy.

As for mercy in its broadest sense, it means all the good that emanates from Him. And, insofar as the Qur'an contains a divine code for people to follow, it is a mercy to all of them. By the same token, the Prophet who has brought it to them is also a mercy for them all. That is why God says: *We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations* (21:107). And we have discussed some aspects of this previously.

أَمْ حَسِبَ الَّذِينَ اجْتَرَحُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ أَنْ نَجْعَلَهُمْ كَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَوَاءً مَحْيَاهُمْ وَمَمَاتُهُمْ ۚ سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(45:21) *Or do those who have perpetrated misdeeds suppose that We shall make them as those who have faith and do righteous deeds, their life and death being equal? Evil is the judgement that they make!*

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says: "To perpetrate" (*ijtirāḥ*) means "to earn" (*iktisāb*). The word is derived from the root meaning "to wound" (*jarḥ*) because it has an effect like the effect of a surgeon (*jarrāḥ*).

A "misdeed" (*sayyiʾah*) is an evil act which brings harm to its doer because it invites rebuke to him.

Here *make them* means to treat them.

The phrase *as those who have faith and do righteous deeds* is in the grammatical position of a second object for *make*.

Zamaksharī asserts in his *Kashshāf* that the particle *as* (ka) in …*as those who…* is actually a noun in its own right with the meaning "like" (*mithl*), and this noun is the second object of the verb *make*. In this reading, *equal* (sawāʾ) becomes a permutation (*badal*) of this second object.

Equal (*sawāʾ*) is in the accusative case (*naṣb*) according to the common recitation. It is a verbal noun being used to signify the meaning of an active participle, i.e. *mustawiyan* or *mutasāwiyan* (both of which carry the meaning of being equal to something). *Their life* (maḥyāhum) is a *mīm*-prefixed verbal noun and the subject of *equal*. It goes back to the combined grouping of the believers and those who perpetrate misdeeds. *Their death* is joined to *their life* and it follows the same pattern.

This verse is phrased as a rhetorical question, and "or" (*am*) is discontinuous. So the meaning is: "Rather do those who earn evil deeds think that we will treat them as equals to those who believe and behave righteously, equal in their life and death?" In other words: do they think that their lives and deaths will be identical, that believing in the Religion and following it are be pointless, and that whether they believed or not will have no effect on their life or death?

Evil is the judgement that they make! rejects their aforementioned supposition that the sinners will be treated like those who believed and acted righteously. Calling a judgement *evil* alludes to its falsity.

After all, the two groups are not equal in life or in death. As for in life, it is because those who believe and do righteous deeds follow a way of life based on a true perception of their condition, and guidance and mercy from their Lord, as has been mentioned in the verse above. On the other hand, the evil-doer is the opposite of this. Elsewhere, God says: *those who follow My guidance will not go astray, nor will they be miserable. But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life* (20:123–124); and He also says: *Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells*

in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave? (6:122).

As for in death, they obviously differ because it has been clearly demonstrated that death does not represent the end of a thing's existence or the annihilation of the human soul, as those who follow falsehoods suppose. Rather, death represents the return to God and the transition from the life of this world to the life of the Hereafter, which is the final abode, the realm of eternal life, in which the righteous believer will live in happiness and ease, while others will live in misery and suffering.

God has alluded to this before when He said: *thus does God revive the dead* (2:73); *Then you will be brought back to your Lord* (32:11); and *God created the heavens and the earth with truth* (45:22).

The way in which this verse fits together and the meaning it gives have become subjects of much controversy amongst commentators, who have mentioned a great many possible interpretations for it. However, the reading best supported by the context is what we have said above, and there is not much benefit in mentioning all the different readings that have been offered. Interested readers can find these in the appropriate places.

وَخَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ وَلِتُجْزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(45:22) *God created the heavens and the earth with truth, so that every soul may be requited with what it has earned, and they will not be wronged.*

The apparent meaning of *the heavens and the earth* is the entirety of the perceptible universe (*al-ʿālam al-mashhūd*). The particle *with* (*bi*) in *with truth* is to indicate concomitance. In other words, the creation of the world being with truth means it was done for a reason rather than vainly or without purpose, and that reason is that this world of generation and corruption has a subsistent and lasting goal that lies beyond it.

…so that every soul may be requited is joined to *…with truth…* and the particle *with* (bi) in *with what it has earned* is to make it transitive or reciprocal, in other words that it will be recompensed in return for what it has earned; if it was obedient, then it will be rewarded; if it was sinful, it will be punished. *And they will not be wronged* is a circumstantial qualifier for *so that every soul may be requited…* meaning it will be requited justly.

So when the verse says that God created the heavens and the earth with

truth and with justice, with truth means that there must be some other world the lies beyond this one in which beings will endure. As for justice, this means that each soul will be given what it deserves based on what it has earned in this life, so one who has done good will be requited with good, and one who has done evil will be requited with evil. And because this does not take place in this world, it must take place in the other world.

From this, it becomes clear that this verse actually contains two arguments for the Resurrection. God alludes to the first of them with His saying: *God created the heavens and the earth with truth*. This argument follows from the idea of truth. God refers to the second argument when He says: *so that every soul may be requited with what it has earned*… and this follows from the idea of justice.

And both of these arguments go back to another verse: *We did not create the sky and the earth and whatever is between them in vain. That is a conjecture of the faithless. So woe to the faithless for the Fire! Shall We treat those who have faith and do righteous deeds like those who cause corruption on the earth? Shall We treat the Godwary like the vicious?* (38:27–28)

This verse and its contents invalidate their supposition that the evil-doer and the good-doer are alike in death, for it discusses the reward and punishment and the consequences of obedience and disobedience on the Day of Resurrection. This refutes the notion that the obedient and the sinful will be equal in death. The logical consequence of this is to invalidate their supposition that the evil-doer is like the good-doer in life as well, for the reward promised in recompense for good deeds on that Day necessitates obedience in this world. Moreover, the good-doer acts on the basis of insight of the reality of things in his life, observes his moral duties and prepares in his today for his tomorrow. This is completely the opposite of an evil-doer, who dwells in blindness and error. So they are not equal at all.

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَٰهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ عَلَىٰ بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ اللَّهِ ۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(45:23) ***Have you seen him who has taken to be his god his desire and whom God has led astray upon knowledge and set a seal upon his hearing and his heart, and put a blindfold on his sight. So who***

will guide him after God? Will you not then take admonition?

The context suggests that *Have you seen…?* is supposed to inspire astonishment, meaning: "Is it not astonishing that…"

…taken to be his god his desire means, because the word *god* has been placed before *desire*, that he knows that he has a real God whom he should worship, but he swaps this God for his own desire, puts it in His place and worships it. He is a disbeliever in God, despite having knowledge of Him. That is why God appends the phrase *and whom God has led astray upon knowledge*. This means that he has strayed from the path knowingly.

The meaning of taking something as a god is to worship it, in the sense of giving it your obedience. God considers obedience an act of worship, as we can see from the verses:

Did I not exhort you, O children of Adam, saying, "Do not worship Satan. He is indeed your manifest enemy. Worship Me." (36:60–61)

They have taken their scribes and their monks as lords besides God… (9:31)

…and that we will not take each other as lords besides God. (3:63)

And if we reflect on this, it makes perfect sense. After all, worship is nothing other than a demonstration of submission and an illustration that the worshipper is a servant who neither wants anything or does anything except that which his object of worship is pleased with. So whoever obeys a thing has taken it as a god and worshipped it, so whoever obeys his desires has taken his desires as a god. But obedience belongs only to God or to someone for whom God has enjoined it.

So *Have you seen him who has taken to be his god his desire…?* means "Does it not amaze you that a person worships his desire by obeying it and following it while he knows that he has a God whom he should worship and obey, but instead he makes his god and his master his own desire?"

…and whom God has led astray upon knowledge… means that he is astray because God has led him astray as a recompense for following his desires, while this person knew that he was going astray. There is no contradiction between going astray while one has knowledge and awareness of the right path. See, for example, God's saying: *They impugned them though they were convinced in their hearts* (27:14). This is because knowledge is not the same thing as guidance, nor is error the same thing as ignorance. Rather, guidance requires a person to both have knowledge and to act according to that knowledge. If he does this, then this leads to him being

guided. But if there is something with knowledge who does not act upon it because he is following his desires, then this does not lead to him being guided, rather it leads him astray, even with knowledge.

As for the interpretation some commentators have put forth: *Knowledge* means God's knowledge, in which case the verse means: "God leads him astray knowing his condition." This is very unlikely given the context.

…and set a seal upon his hearing and his heart, and put a blindfold on his sight: This serves as an explanation to God's words: *…and whom God has led astray upon knowledge*. To seal a person's hearing and heart means that he does not hear the truth nor does he comprehend it, and setting a blindfold on his sight means that he does not perceive the truth from God's signs. In short, his hearing, heart and sight have no benefit to him because he does not take up whatever truth he obtains because of his own arrogance and following his own desire. And you know well that going astray from the right path does not preclude a person having knowledge of it when this person does not act upon this knowledge.

So who will guide him after God? *Him* refers to the one who has taken his desire as his god, and this clause derives from what has already been said about his condition. In other words, when he is in such a condition that God has led him astray upon knowledge, etc., then who can guide him after God, when there is no guide except him? God says: *Say, "Indeed it is the guidance of God which is the guidance*" (2:160); elsewhere, God says: *…and whomever God leads astray has no guide* (40:33).

Will you not then take admonition? Meaning: Will you not think about such a person's condition, realize that there is no way for you to attain guidance while you are following your own desires, and take a lesson from that?

وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلَّا الدَّهْرُ ۚ وَمَا لَهُمْ بِذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ ۖ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(45:24) ***They say, "It is nothing but the life of this world: we die and we live, and nothing but the age*** **(al-dahr)** ***destroys us." But they do not have any knowledge of that, and they only make conjectures.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Dahr* was originally the name given to the duration of the world's existence from its very beginning until its eventual end. It is in

this sense that God says: *Has there been for man an age…*? (76:1). Then it can be used to refer to any long period of time. This is unlike *zamān*, for the word *zamān* is used for both long and short periods.

This verse, based on what its context—which is one of arguing against the idolaters who believe in the Maker but not in the Resurrection—suggests, relates something the idolaters have said in denial of the Resurrection. These are not the words of the philosophical school of the Dahriyyah, who say that the existence and non-existence of all phenomena comes from the world being eternal, without beginning or end, as they are not mentioned in the above verses.

When they say *It is nothing but the life of this world*, the pronoun *it* refers to life. In other words: There is no life for us except the life of this world, there is no life beyond it, so the Resurrection and Hereafter that the Divine Religion speaks about are unreal. This is a contextual indicator that shows *we die and we live* means some of us die and others of us live, and that is how the human race continues to exist; preceding generations die and new generations live. This is also supported, to some extent, by the words: *and nothing but the age destroys us* as *destroys* is an imperfect verb, signifying continuity.

With this in mind, the present verse means: The idolaters say: "Life is naught but our life in this world which we live in the here and now; some of us will die, and they are the older generations, while others will live, and they are the new generations. Nothing destroys us but time whose passage makes new become old, draws every being towards ruin and causes every living thing to die. So death is not a passage from one abode to another that leads to the Resurrection and returning to God."

Perhaps this was the belief of some of the ignorant Arab idolaters; otherwise, the common doctrine of idolaters is that of reincarnation (*tanāsukh*), namely that when the imperfect souls of imperfect beings leave their bodies, they become connected to new bodies. If the soul had earned happiness in its previous body, it will inhere in a new body in which it will find a life of comfort and happiness. And if it had earned wretchedness in its previous body, then it will inhere in a new body in which it will be endure misery and suffering as a karmic recompense for its evil deeds. And so on and so forth. Moreover, they did not deny that death, like life, was the responsibility of angelic mediators. For this reason—by which I mean the common belief in reincarnation amongst

idolaters—some commentators have said that this verse actually refers to reincarnation. In this case, we can read it as: "*It is nothing but the life of this world*, so we will never leave this world, *we die* in this worldly existence *and we live* after death by entering a new body, and so on. *And nothing but the age destroys us*."

This reading is not without merit, but it does not accord with the statement related from them: *And nothing but the age destroys us*. Unless, of course, we take this to mean that the age (*dahr*) is a means by which the angel entrusted with death actually brings it about. However, it also fails to accord with an argument they use below: *Bring our fathers back, should you be truthful.* This shows that they think their fathers have ceased to exist entirely.

Other interpretations have been offered for this verse which must be put aside, for example: It means that we will be dead and without life and that is before the spirit enters our bodies, then we will come to life when it enters us. As when God says: *you were lifeless and He gave you life* (2:28).

Or, as some have said: "To live" is a figure of speech for procreation. In which case, the verse means: We die, but our children live on.

And there are other interpretations still.

But they do not have any knowledge of that, and they only make conjectures: In other words: What they say implying that they deny the Resurrection is something spoken without knowledge, it is just a conjecture they are making because they have no evidence to refute the Resurrection while there is ample evidence to affirm it.

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ مَا كَانَ حُجَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا ائْتُوا بِآبَائِنَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(45:25) ***And when Our manifest signs are recited to them, their only argument is to say, "Bring our fathers back, should you be truthful."***

This demonstrates that their rejection of the Resurrection and their belief that there is nothing beyond the life of this world is something they say without any knowledge.

Manifest signs means those signs containing proofs affirming the Resurrection; they are called manifest because they clearly demonstrate its truth and leave no doubt. Their saying *Bring our fathers back, should*

you be truthful is called an *argument* (ḥujjah), even though it is a senseless demand after the proof has been made clear to them, as a form of ridicule because it is like asking for proof of something that has just been proven to you. So it is as if to say: "Your argument is that there is no argument."

So the verse means: "When our verses containing proofs affirming the Resurrection and which clearly demonstrate its truth are recited those who deny it, their only response is to make senseless demands like demanding proof of its possibility by resurrecting their forefathers!"

قُلِ اللَّهُ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يَجْمَعُكُمْ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا رَيْبَ
فِيهِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَخْسَرُ الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(45:26–27) ***Say, "It is God who gives you life, then He makes you die. Then He will gather you on the Day of Resurrection, in which there is no doubt. But most people do not know. To God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and on the day the Hour sets in, the falsifiers will be losers on that day."***

Even though their asking for proof having just been presented with it is nothing but a senseless and impertinent demand that does not warrant an answer, God commands His Prophet to respond to them by affirming its possibility (*imkān*), which they thought farfetched.

In short, the argument goes: The one who makes you live the first time, then causes you to die and then gathers you for the Day of Resurrection, in which there is no doubt, is God. Now, God has dominion over the heavens and the earth; He governs them as He wishes and disposes them as He pleases. So, if He wants to, He can bring people back to them and dispose you to gather for the Day of Resurrection, judge between you and recompense you. The remainder of the meaning is clear.

…and on the day the Hour sets in, the falsifiers will be losers on that day: al-Raghib says: "Loss" (*khasr*) means a reduction in capital. This is attributed to someone by saying "so-and-so lost" (*khasara fulān*). It can also be attributed to an action: "His trade lost" (*khasarat tijāratuhu*). God says: *This, then, is a ruinous return!* (79:12). It can be attributed to external acquisitions such as money and rank in this world, which is most common, but also to personal acquisitions such as health, vigor, sense, faith, and

divine reward, which is what God calls "a manifest loss" (*khusrān mubīn*).

He continues: Every loss that God mentions in the Qur'an is always in the last sense above rather than monetary or business losses made by human beings.

He also says: "To falsify" (*ibṭāl*) means to ruin a thing or remove it, whether it is real or not. God says: *so that He may confirm the truth and falsify falsehood* (8:8). It is also used for someone who says something that has no truth to it: *Indeed if you bring them a sign, the faithless will surely say, "You are nothing but fabricators!"* (30:58). Elsewhere, God says: *…and it is thence that the falsifiers become losers* (40:78), meaning that those who consider the truth false will become losers.

The most likely interpretation here is that *when the Hour sets in* refers to when everything that is supposed to befall therein comes to pass: the Resurrection, accounting and recompense, and when the Hour becomes manifest. In this way it is proper to make the Hour a container for the Day [of Judgement], even though they are really the same thing. It is also most appropriate to read *on that day* as emphasis for *on the day the Hour sets in.*

So this verse means: "And on the Day when the Hour sets in, and it is the day on which people return to God, on that day the falsifiers, who called the truth false and turned away from it, will be losers."

وَتَرَىٰ كُلَّ أُمَّةٍ جَاثِيَةً ۚ كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ تُدْعَىٰ إِلَىٰ كِتَابِهَا الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(45:28) ***And you will see every nation fallen [on its knees]. Every nation will be summoned to its book. Today you will be requited for what you used to do.***

Fallen (jathuw) means to sink to one's knees, just as "prostrate" (*jadhuw*) means to go down upon one's fingers.

This verse is a general address to anyone who has the ability to see, even though it is directed to the Prophet. *Summoned to its book* means called to be held to account, insofar as *book* is used to refer to the complete record of a person's deeds. This is attested to by the words below: *Today you will be requited for what you used to do.…*

So it means: "You and everyone else with sight will see every single nation upon its knees, humbled and fearful. Each one of them will be called to its own book, which is the record of its deeds. And they will be

told: '*Today you will be requited for what you used to do.*'"

From this verse we can glean that every nation will have its own unique book, just as every person will have their own unique one too. God says: *We have attached every person's omen to his neck, and We shall bring it out for him on the Day of Resurrection as a wide open book that he will encounter* (17:13).

هَٰذَا كِتَابُنَا يَنْطِقُ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْحَقِّ ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا نَسْتَنْسِخُ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(45:29) ***This is Our book, which speaks truly against you. Indeed We used to transcribe*** **(nastansikh)** ***what you used to do.***

In *Ṣiḥāḥ*, we read: "In Arabic, *nasakhat al-kitāb*, *intasakhtuh*, and *istansakhtuh* all have the same meaning."

al-Rāghib says:

> To abrogate (*naskh*) means to efface something with something else that follows it, just as sun abrogates shade and shade abrogates the sun, and the old abrogates the young… but when we speak of *naskh al-kitāb* this means transferring the form of its text to another book, and this does not involve the effacement of the first form, rather it entails the copying of it to another material. This is like using a single signet ring to imprint numerous wax seals. *Al-istinsākh* means to set about transcribing something.

The upshot of what we have quoted above is that the object of the verb *transcribe* is the source from which the copying took place; this means that the deeds *you used to do* must be a source and a book. Or, you could say: In the form of a source and a book from which they are copied. If what is meant is that a person's external deeds are recorded in writing, then it would have been said: "We used to write what you used to do," for there is nothing to suggest that these deeds were a book or a source to be copied, nor is there any evidence that *record* (yastansikh) here means "we write", as some have suggested.

Consequently, *what you used to do* means a person's external deeds insofar as they exist within the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*). So when their deeds are transcribed, this means what is connected with their deeds in the Guarded Tablet is transcribed, and their record of deeds is not just a record of their deeds, but also a part of the Guarded Tablet. If this is the case, then the meaning of the angels recording people's deeds means correlating what they have from the transcription of the Tablet

with their deeds.

This is the explanation that has come down in Shiʿi narrations from Imam al-Ṣādiq and through Sunni narrations from Ibn ʿAbbās. We will discuss these in the study of the narrations, below.

In this case, *This is Our book, which speaks against you with truth* is part of God's speech rather than the speech of the angels, and this is part of God's address to the people gathered on the Day of Resurrection which He relates to us. So the meaning is: "They will be told: '*This is Our book*.…'"

This—based on the context—refers to the record of deeds (*ṣaḥīfat al-aʿmāl*) which is itself, based on what we have already said, a reference to the Guarded Tablet. God calls it a book insofar as it is the record of deeds is written by his command, and insofar as it is the Guarded Tablet in order to honour it. The phrase …*which speaks against you with truth* means that it testifies to what you did and shows it clearly in accordance with the truth.

Were it not for the fact that this book shows them their deeds in such a way that there is no doubt and there is no room for them to deny it, they would have denied it. God says: *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and as to whatever evil it has done it will wish there were a far distance between it and itself* (3:30).

Commentators have offered alternative interpretations of the verses, including: The verse is the speech of the angels, not the speech of God. The meaning of "transcribe" is writing. And as a whole, this verse means: "This—meaning the record of deeds—is our—the angels who record your deeds—book, which will testify against you with truth. For we used to write down what you used to do."

However, the context makes it highly improbable that this is the speech of the angels. Moreover, the idea that transcription means writing in general is something not supported by a study of the Arabic language.

Another interpretation is that the verse is God's speech and *this* refers to the record of deeds. It is said that it refers to the Guarded Tablet and "transcribing" means any sort of writing.

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَيُدْخِلُهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿٣٠﴾

(45:30) ***As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, their Lord will admit them into His mercy. That is the manifest victory!***

Here, the Qur'an turns to describe the condition of people on that day according to their different statuses, whether they are destined for felicity or misery, and reward or punishment. The felicitous who will be rewarded are those who believed and did righteous deeds, while the wretched who will be punished are those arrogant sinners who disbelieved.

Mercy in this verse refers to the divine effusion which will make felicitous those who dwell in it. Paradise is a part of this. *Manifest victory* means a clear success. The rest of the meaning is clear.

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَفَلَمْ تَكُنْ آيَاتِي تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ وَكُنْتُمْ قَوْمًا مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(45:31) ***But as for the faithless, "Were not My signs then recited to you? But you were disdainful, and you were a guilty lot."***

The faithless means those shrouded in faithlessness due to their own denial and obstinacy, as evinced by God's saying: *Were not My signs then recited to you? But you were disdainful….*

Then (fa) in *were not My signs then…* is to signify that this follows logically from something, namely *As for the faithless…* This renders the meaning: "It will be said to them: '*Were not my signs recited to you?*'" Here, *signs* mean the divine proofs that were sent to them through revelation and preaching. The *guilty* is one who is consumed by wrongdoing and sin.

So this verse means: "As for those who disbelieved in the truth obstinately, despite how obvious it was to them, they will be told as a rebuke: 'Were not my proofs read out and made clear to you in this world? But you were too arrogant to accept them and you were a sinful people.'"

وَإِذَا قِيلَ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَالسَّاعَةُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا قُلْتُمْ مَا نَدْرِي مَا السَّاعَةُ إِنْ نَظُنُّ إِلَّا ظَنًّا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُسْتَيْقِنِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(45:32) ***And when it was said, "God's promise is indeed true, and there is no doubt about the Hour," you said, "We do not know what the Hour is. We know nothing beyond conjectures, and we do not possess any certainty."***

Promise (waʿd) means "the-thing-promised" (*mawʿūd*) and this refers to what God has promised upon the tongue of His messengers, namely

the Resurrection and judgement. This makes *and there is no doubt about the Hour* an explanation of what God promised. It is also possible that *promise* gives the meaning of a verbal noun (i.e. "God promises the truth").

We do not know what the Hour is meaning they claim not to understand it, even though they are people of intelligence and discernment. So they mean that it is something incomprehensible, otherwise they would have surely grasped it.

We know nothing beyond conjectures, and we do not possess any certainty—in other words, this is not something we are certain about; we have only conjectures which we cannot rely upon. So in these words of theirs and those above—*We do not know what the Hour is*—is their response to the manifest signs that were recited to them, and they display a most outrageous disdain for the truth.

وَبَدَا لَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا عَمِلُوا وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(45:33) ***The evils of what they had done will appear to them, and they will be besieged by what they used to deride.***

Here, the Arabic can either be read as *the evils of what they had done* or *the evils that they had done. What/that they had done* refers to the entire category of their actions. In other words, their evil deeds or the evils of their deeds will become apparent to them. So this verse is in the same vein as God's saying: *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done* (3:30).

So this is one of the verses which indicate that people's deeds will take on a physical reality for them. It is also said that the verse means the recompense for *the evils of what they had done will appear to them*.

…and they will be besieged by what they used to deride means that the punishment they used to mock when they were warned about by the Prophets and Messengers in this world will come upon them.

وَقِيلَ الْيَوْمَ نَنْسَاكُمْ كَمَا نَسِيتُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَذَا وَمَأْوَاكُمُ النَّارُ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(45:34) ***And it will be said, "Today We will forget you, just as you forgot the encounter of this day of yours. The Fire will be your abode, and you will not have any helpers."***

Here, *forget* refers to turning away from and abandoning. So when God says He will forget them on the Day of Resurrection, this means He will turn away from them and abandon them in their time of terror and hardship. And when God says they forget the encounter of their day, this refers to their turning away from His remembrance in this world and failing to prepare for this day. The remainder of the meaning is clear.

ذَٰلِكُمْ بِأَنَّكُمُ اتَّخَذْتُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوًا وَغَرَّتْكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا ۚ فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يُخْرَجُونَ مِنْهَا وَلَا هُمْ يُسْتَعْتَبُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(45:35) ***That is because you took the signs of God in derision, and the life of the world had deceived you. So today they will not be brought out of it, nor will they be asked to propitiate.***

That refers to the fate described above; their evil deeds appearing to them and the punishment descending upon them. "Derision" means mockery and the *bā'* (translated: "because") signifies causation.

This means: That punishment which will descend upon you is because you took God's signs in jest and derided them, and because you were deceived by the life of this world and became attached to it to the point that you wanted to live in it forever.

So today they will not be brought out of it, nor will they be asked to propitiate: Now the address turns from the faithless to the Prophet, and this passage sums up the punishment they will suffer on that day, namely that they will remain in Hell forever and no excuse will be accepted from them.

فَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَرَبِّ الْأَرْضِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(45:36) ***So to God all praise belongs, the Lord of the heavens and the Lord of the earth, the Lord of the worlds.***

This praises Him as a result of everything that has been said in this sūrah; that He is the creator of the heavens, the earth and everything in between, that He is the governor of everyone's affairs, and that one of the marvellous aspects of His creation is the fact He has created everything with a purpose, in order to return to him and be recompensed for their deeds. And this fact necessitates the promulgation of divine paths which people can follow towards happiness and reward; this is followed

by gathering for the Day of Resurrection, then the recompense of all and their residing in His justice or mercy; everything will be given what it deserves. In all of this, God will only govern beautifully, and He will only act in a manner that is praiseworthy. So His is the praise in its entirety!

The word *Lord* is repeated in *the Lord of the heavens and the Lord of the earth*, before it is given another permutation (*badal*) in *the Lord of the worlds.* This is to show that His Lordship encompasses everything; if He said only "Lord of the worlds", perhaps someone would falsely imagine that He is the Lord of all but that the heavens also have a lord of their own and the earth has a lord of its own, leading them to believe in something like the idolaters believe in. The same applies if He had only said "the Lord of the heavens and the earth" because this would not say anything about His lordship over other things. And, of course, the same is true if He had only mentioned one of them.

وَلَهُ الْكِبْرِيَاءُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٧﴾

(45:37) ***To Him belongs all supremacy in the heavens and the earth, and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.***

According to al-Rāghib, *Supremacy* (kibriyāʾ) means: Being above submission. Ibn Athīr says it means magnificence and dominion. In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Ṭabrisī says it means absolute authority, majesty, and superiority.

In any case, this is the most profound sense of "greatness" (*kibr*) and it is used for a magnificence that lies beyond sense and that ultimately goes back to His perfect being (*kamāl wujūdih*), whose perfection is infinite.

To Him belongs all supremacy in the heavens and the earth means He has supremacy everywhere; nothing in the heavens or the earth can be above him, nor can anything belittle him. And placing the predicate (*To him belongs*) in front of the subject (*all supremacy*), indicates that it belongs only to him, as when He says: *to God all praise belongs* in the previous verse.

…and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise means that He overcomes all without being overcome Himself in whatever He wishes to create and govern in this world and the Hereafter, and that His creation and His governance are based on wisdom and beautiful conduct.

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says about the phrase *Have you seen him who*

has taken to be his god his desire (45:23):
This was revealed about the Quraysh; whenever they desired something, they would worship it.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mundhir, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Ibn ʿAbbās:
A man of the Arabs would worship a stone, and when he found something better than it, he would take that and cast it aside. So God revealed: *Have you seen him who has taken to be his god his desire?*

(3) *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says about God's saying *and nothing but the age destroys us* (45:24):
It is narrated in a tradition from the Prophet: "Do not revile the age, for God is the age."

Author's comments: After presenting this tradition, Ṭabrisī says: "The explanation of this is that people in the Age of Ignorance would attribute unpleasant occurrences and tribulations to the age (*dahr*), saying: 'The age has treated me thus…' and they would revile it. So the Prophet is saying: 'The one who does these things is God, so do not revile the one who does them!'" This reading is supported by the next narration.

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Jarīr and Bayhaqī—in *al-Asmāʾ wa al-Ṣifāt*—relate from Abū Hurayrah that God's Messenger said:
God says: "Let not the son of Adam revile the age by saying: 'O age, you ne'er do-well!' For I am the age; I send the night and the day and if I wished I would have taken them away."

(5) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says about the verse *This is Our book, which speaks against you with truth…* (45:29):
My father narrated from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qaṣīr, who asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh about the verse *Nūn. By the Pen…* (68:1).
He said: "God created the Pen from a tree in Paradise called 'eternality' (*khuld*). Then He told a river in Paradise: 'Be ink.' So the river solidified into ink that was whiter than snow and sweeter than honey. Then He told the Pen: 'Write!' The Pen asked: 'O Lord! What shall I write?' He said: 'Write what was and what will be until the Day of Resurrection.' So the Pen wrote upon a parchment brighter than silver and clearer than a jewel. Then He rolled it up and placed it in a pillar of the Throne before sealing the Pen's mouth so that it will never speak.

"So it is the Hidden Book from which everything is copied. Are you not Arabs? So how do you not understand the meaning of plain speech? When one of you tells his companion, 'Transcribe that book', can you not only transcribe from another book which is the original? That is God's saying: *Indeed We used to transcribe what you used to do* (45:29)."

Author's comments: When he says: "So the Pen wrote upon a parchment…", this compares the Inscribed Tablet containing all the events of the world to a parchment, which—according to al-Rāghib—is like a piece of paper for writing upon. And we have previously encountered the tradition from the Imam saying that the Pen is an angel and the Tablet is an angel. When he says: "…and placed it in a pillar of the Throne…" this compares the Throne to that of a king, which has pillars and poles. His saying: "Then He sealed the mouth of the Pen…" refers to the fact that the contents of that parchment are part of the Foreordained Decree (*al-qadāʾ al-maḥtūm*) which cannot be changed or altered. When he says: "Are you not Arabs?" this refers to what has already explained in our commentary on the verse.

(6) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Jarīr narrates from Ibn ʿAbbās:

God created *Nūn*, which was the ink. And He created the Pen. He said to it: "Write!"

It said: "What shall I write?"

He said: "Write whatever will be until the Day of Resurrection; deeds that are done—whether pious or wicked—provision provided—whether licit or illicit. Then upon all of this He imposed of its affair: When it will enter the world, how long it will stay in it, and how it will leave it? Then He appointed guardians for His servants and custodians to guard the Book—the former transcribe every day the deeds of that day from the custodians—and when that provision is used up, the matter is cut off and the appointed time is reached, the guardians come seeking the deeds of that day from the custodians, they will tell them: 'We find nothing with us for your charge.' So the guardians go back and find that their charge has died."

Then Ibn ʿAbbās said:

Are you not Arabs? You hear the guardians saying *Indeed We used to transcribe what you used to do* and can you transcribe from anything other than an original book?

Author's comments: As you can see, this account makes the verse the

speech of the guardian angels.

However, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Ibn ʿAbbās about this verse: "The guardians transcribe whatever the children of Adam do from the Mother Book, so a person only does whatever the angel copies from the Mother Book."

(7) Ibn Ṭāwūs says in *Saʿd al-Suʿūd*, after mentioning the two angels charged with God's servant: There is a narration that says:
When [the two angels] want to descend in the morning and the evening, Raphael (Isrāfīl) copies for them the servant's deeds from the Guarded Tablet and gives these to them. And when they ascend in the morning and the evening with the servant's records (*dīwān*), Raphael receives it from them along with the copy he had made for them. This is done in order that it be apparent that the copy and the records are alike.

(8) About the verse *To Him belongs all supremacy in the heavens and the earth… Majmaʿ al-Bayān* relates the tradition:
God says: "Supremacy is my cloak, magnificence is my robe—so whoever contends with Me in either of these, I shall throw him into the fires of hell."

Author's comments: This is also narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, and others from Abū Hurayrah from the Prophet.

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Chapter 46

Sūrah al-Aḥqāf

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Verses 1–14

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

The aim of this sūrah is to warn the idolaters who reject the prophetic call to believe in God and His Messenger about the Resurrection and the painful punishment that awaits therein for those who turn away and deny. For this reason, God commences the sūrah by affirming the Resurrection: *We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except with truth…* (46:3) and comes back to this theme time after time, such as when He says:

When mankind are mustered…. (46:6)

As for him who says to his parents, "Fie on you! Do you promise me that I shall be raised…?" (46:17)

The day when the faithless are exposed to the Fire, "You have exhausted your good things…" (46:20)

The day when the faithless are exposed to the Fire, "Is this not a fact?" (46:34)

Before concluding the sūrah with the words: *The day when they see what they are promised, as though they had remained only an hour of a day. This is a proclamation.* (46:35)

This sūrah also contains arguments for God's oneness and prophethood, while referring to the destruction of the people of Hūd and of villages in the vicinity of Mecca and warning the idolaters of them. It also informs them that a group of the jinn were present with the Prophet, listened to the Qur'an and believed in it before returning to their people and warning them also.

The sūrah was revealed in Mecca in its entirety aside for two verses about which commentators have disagreed. We shall look at these in our study of the traditions, God-willing. They are: *Do they say, "He has*

fabricated it…?" (46:8) and *Say, "Tell me, if it is from God…"* (46:10)

حم ﴿١﴾ تَنْزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

(46:1–2) ***Ḥā, Mīm. The sending down of the Book is from God, the All-mighty, the All-wise.***

The meaning of these verses has already been explained.

مَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ۚ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَمَّا أُنْذِرُوا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(46:3) ***We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except with truth and for a specified term. Yet the faithless are disregardful of what they are warned.***

The heavens and the earth and whatever is between them refers to the perceptible world, both terrestrial and supernal. The preposition *bāʾ* (translated as *with*) in *with truth* (bi al-ḥaqq) is to signify concomitance. *A specified term* means that point at which the existence of a thing ends. In the verse this is the *specified term* for the existence of the entire universe, which alludes to the Day of Resurrection, on which the heaven will be rolled up like scrolls (see 21:104), and the earth will be transformed into a new earth and the heavens as well, and they are presented before God, the One, the All-paramount (see 14:48).

This means: "We did not create the perceptible universe and all of its components, the terrestrial and the supernal, except concomitant with the truth, with a fixed destination and accompanied by a specified term for its existence, which it cannot exceed. When that time comes, it will be annihilated. But it also has a fixed goal, for after this world another world will come which is the world of eternal life; the promised Resurrection." And we already have discussed many times already what it means for creation to be concomitant *with truth*.

Yet the faithless are disregardful of what they are warned: On the basis of the following verse, *the faithless* refers to the idolaters. However, the context suggests that God is referring to their disbelief in the Resurrection which they have been warned about; the Day of Judgement and the painful punishment it holds for those who associate partners with God. It is this that they turn away from and disregard.

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقُوا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ ۖ ائْتُونِي بِكِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ هَٰذَا أَوْ أَثَارَةٍ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٤﴾

(46:4) ***Say, "Do you see what you invoke besides God. Show me what [part] of the earth have they created. Do they have any share in the heavens? Bring me a scripture before this or a trace of knowledge, should you be truthful."***

Do you see… in this context means "tell me about…" and *what you invoke besides God* means the idols that they would invoke and worship. After this, God refers to these idols in the plural, which is normally reserved for beings with intellects, because the idolaters would attribute the actions of intelligent beings to them. However, the argument being made in this verse applies equally to the idols and to any other deity worshipped besides God.

…Show me what of the earth have they created: *Show me* here has the meaning of "inform me" and *what* here is used as a question to which *of the earth have they created* is semantically attached.

Do they have any share in the heavens? This means "Do they have any share in the creation of the heavens?" because it is in the context of asking whether they have created anything in the heavens and the earth.

To clarify: They only attributed the management of the cosmos to their gods while restricting the act of creation to God alone; as God says elsewhere: *If you ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" they will surely say, "God"* (39:38); and: *If you ask them, "Who created them?" they will surely say, "God."* (43:87) However, because the power of creation is not separable from the power of governance, this means that if their gods have some role in governing the cosmos, they must have played some role in creating it. That is why God tells His Prophet to ask them about their lords who they invoke besides God, whether they have any share in the creation of the heavens or the creation of the earth, for the notion of governance is meaningless without that of creation.

Bring me a scripture before this, or a trace of knowledge, should you be truthful: *This* refers to the Qur'an, and *scripture before this* means a divine scripture like the Torah which came down from God in which He mentions that their gods have some share in the creation of the heavens

or the earth.

According to Rāghib, *trace* (athārah) is a verbal noun with the meaning of narration or transmission. He says: "I trace knowledge means I narrated it, and the original meaning of this is to follow something's tracks." With this in mind, *trace* in the verse is a verbal noun being used with the meaning of a passive participle, namely "a thing transmitted." So *a trace of knowledge* means some knowledge which has been transmitted to the effect that their gods have any share in the heavens and the earth. However, most commentators have interpreted *trace* in the sense of *vestige*, which is very close in meaning to what we have said above.

So this verse means: "If you want to show that they have some share with God in the creation of anything in the heavens or the earth, then you must bring me proof; whether a divine scripture from before the Qur'an that mentions that, some knowledge that has been transmitted, or some vestige of knowledge that confirms this, if you are really truthful in your claim that they are God's partners."

وَمَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنْ يَدْعُو مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَنْ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُ لَهُ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَهُمْ عَنْ دُعَائِهِمْ غَافِلُونَ ﴿٥﴾

(46:5) ***Who is more astray than him who invokes besides God such as would not respond to him at the Day of Resurrection, and who are oblivious of their invocation?***

This is a rhetorical question (meaning "no one is more astray") and it establishes that their invocations will not be answered on the Day of Resurrection because the Day of Resurrection is the appointed term of this world, but their invocations are limited to this world and this world shall be no more when the Hour sets in.

Yet another description of their gods in addition to the fact that they will not respond to their invocations. This phrase is not intended to explain why they will not answer their invocations, because the reason for this is that they do not possess anything for their worshippers, as God says: *Say, "Do you worship, besides God, what has no power to bring you any benefit or harm…?"* (5:76).

Rather, their being oblivious is in addition to the fact that they will not respond. And this is mentioned in preparation of what shall be said in the next verse about their enmity towards them and their disavowal

of their worship on the Day of Resurrection. For in this world they are oblivious of their invocations and shall only become aware of them on the Day of Resurrection, at which point they will become opponents of them and disavow their worship.

This verse suggests that life and awareness to some extent inheres in all things, even in inanimate objects such as idols made of wood or stone. After all, it calls them oblivious and being oblivious is a state of being for something with ability to sense; it is only used in relation to things whose nature it is to sense.

وَإِذَا حُشِرَ النَّاسُ كَانُوا لَهُمْ أَعْدَاءً وَكَانُوا بِعِبَادَتِهِمْ كَافِرِينَ ﴿٦﴾

(46:6) ***When mankind are mustered, they will be their enemies, and they will disavow their worship.***

"To muster" (*ḥashr*) means to take something out of its place by coercion; here it refers to the resurrection of people from their graves and driving them to the place of gathering on the Day of Resurrection. On that day their own gods will be their enemies and disavow their idolatrous worship. This is as God says elsewhere: *and on the Day of Resurrection they will forswear your idolatry* (35:14). He also quotes them as saying: *We plead our innocence before You: it was not us that they worshipped* (28:63). Elsewhere still, they are recorded as saying: …*God suffices as a witness between you and us. We were indeed unaware of your worship* (10:29).

Both of these verses allude to the fact that inanimate objects such as these, which we do not think have any life in this world because we see no trace of it in them, will be shown to be alive in the Hereafter. We have already spoken about this to some extent in our commentary on the verse: *They will say, "We were given speech by God, who gave speech to all things…"* (41:21).

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ هَٰذَا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٧﴾

(46:7) ***When Our manifest signs are recited to them, the faithless say of the truth when it comes to them: "This is plain magic."***

This verse and the one that follows it are to be read as a rebuke of the faithless. *Manifest signs* means the verses of the Qur'an which are recited

to them. This is substituted with the truth that has come to them when God says *of the truth when it comes to them…* instead of just saying "of it" to show that these signs are the truth which has come to them. In other words, there is no way to paint these verses as plain magic while they know that they are the manifest truth. Rather, all they are doing is rejecting the truth without evidence and behaving arrogantly towards it.

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۖ قُلْ إِنِ افْتَرَيْتُهُ فَلَا تَمْلِكُونَ لِي مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا ۖ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تُفِيضُونَ فِيهِ ۖ كَفَىٰ بِهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ ۖ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٨﴾

(46:8) ***Do they say, "He has fabricated it?" Say, "Should I have fabricated it, you would not avail me anything against God. He best knows what you gossip concerning it. He suffices as a witness between me and you, and He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful."***

Or (am) here is discontinuous, meaning: "Rather they say he has fabricated the Qur'an and claimed that it is the speech of God."

Say, "Should I have fabricated it, you would not avail me anything against God" means: "If I had fabricated the Qur'an for your sake, God would have seized me with punishment or hastened me to punishment for this lie. And if that were the case, there would be nothing you could do to protect me from His punishment. So why would I fabricate anything for your sakes?" The essence of the argument is: "I am certain of God's command and I know that He would seize the one who fabricates anything against Him or hasten Him to punishment. You, on the other hand, cannot prevent God from doing whatever He wants. So why would I make something like this up and put expose myself to certain punishment for you?" In other words: I have fabricated nothing against Him.

From this it becomes clear that the consequent of the conditional sentence *Should I have fabricated it…* is intentionally left implicit. And in its place, a phrase is put indicating that there is no external obstacle to this consequence being realized. In other words: "If I fabricated it, God would seize me and punish me, and there would be nothing you could do to prevent that!" It should not be read as mentioning the effect instead of the cause, as some commentators have suggested.

He best knows what you gossip concerning it: *Gossip* means idle chatter.

What is either a relative noun to which *concerning it* refers[1] or it is verbal in meaning, in which case *it* refers to the Qur'an.[2] This means: "God knows best what you gossip about; denying the Qur'an with accusations of sorcery and fabrication." Or: "God knows best what you gossip about the Qur'an."

He suffices as a witness between me and you: This is a second argument against the Qur'an being a fabrication. The first argument was *Should I have fabricated it, you would not avail me anything against God*, which we have already explained. The meaning of the second argument is: "The fact that God himself testifies in His speech that this is His speech and not a fabrication of mine is sufficient to show that I did not fabricate it." And God has declared this claim to be true in the verse: *But God bears witness to what He has sent down to you; He sent it down with His knowledge…* (4:166) and there are other verses to this effect too. As for proving that the Qur'an is actually His words, the verses challenging the faithless to produce something equal to it are sufficient for that.[3]

…and He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful: God follows His arguments against their false and arbitrary judgements against prophethood by mentioning these two names, as if He wishes to say: "Your accusation: *He has fabricated it* actually consists of two claims; first that this Qur'an is not actually God's speech, and second that there is no such thing as prophethood (because the idolaters rejected this altogether). As for your first claim, this is refuted firstly by the fact that had he fabricated it, you would not avail him anything etc. and secondly because God suffices as a witness that this is His speech and not my own.

"As for your second claim, this is refuted by the fact that God is All-forgiving, All-merciful. And it is the necessary consequence of His wisdom that He treats His creatures with mercy and clemency, and these only encompass those who turn to him, repent and are worthy of that. For this reason, God guides them to the Straight Path, which they travel upon to gain nearness to Him and his forgiveness and mercy. These take the form of them being unburdened of their evil deeds and being admitted to the abode of eternal happiness. This is the necessary consequence of His

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1 In which case the verse should be rendered: "He best knows what you gossip about." [Trans.]

2 Which is how the verse has been rendered in the text. [Trans.]

3 Otherwise this would be a circular argument. [Trans.]

wisdom because they are worthy of this perfection and He is the most generous and magnanimous one. God says: *and the bounty of your Lord is not confined* (17:20); *With God rests guidance to the straight path* (16:9). The way to bestow this guidance upon them is through the prophetic missions, therefore the Divine Wisdom makes it necessary for God to send people a messenger who will lead them to the path that will convey them to His forgiveness and His mercy."

قُلْ مَا كُنْتُ بِدْعًا مِنَ الرُّسُلِ وَمَا أَدْرِى مَا يُفْعَلُ بِى وَلَا بِكُمْ ۖ إِنْ أَتَّبِعُ
إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَىَّ وَمَا أَنَا إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ۝٩

(46:9) ***Say, "I am not a novelty among the Messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you."***

A novelty means one without precedent, whether in characteristics, words, or deeds. Some interpret this to mean: "I am not the first messenger sent to you without any messenger before me." It is also said: "I am not saying or doing anything novel compared to the messengers that came before me."

The first meaning does not match the context, nor the coda of the previous verse *and He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful* with the reading we have given. So the second of the two meanings for this verse is more appropriate. Therefore, this verse means: "I am not contravening any of the previous prophets, whether in my appearance or my conduct; in word or in deed. Rather I am a man like them with all the human frailties they are subject to. Their way of life is my way of life."

With this statement, God responds to what He has quoted from the idolaters elsewhere: *And they say, "What sort of Messenger is this who eats food and walks in the marketplaces? Why has not an angel been sent down to him so as to be a warner along with him? Or a treasure thrown to him, or [why does] he [not] have a garden from which he may eat?"* (25:7–8)

…nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you: Here he denies having any knowledge of the unseen from himself. This is like his saying elsewhere: *Had I known the Unseen, I would have acquired much good, and no ill would have befallen me* (7:188). The difference between the two verses is that when he says *Had I known the Unseen…* this negates knowledge of the unseen in general and attests to this by the fact that he

suffers ill and does not acquire much good. On the other hand, when he says: *nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you* this negates a specific kind of knowledge of the unseen, namely what will be done with him and them in happenings that they will all face. He says this because the idolaters claimed that someone with the powers of prophethood, if there was such a person, should have innate knowledge of the unseen almost without restriction. This belief is demonstrated by the many demands that the Qur'an relates from them. In response, God tells him to openly admit that he has no knowledge of what will happen to them or him and thus denying that he has any knowledge of the unseen from himself. Moreover, he means to say that whatever happens to him or them is beyond his ability to control; he has no say in it. Rather God will do whatever He pleases with them.

Moreover, when he says *nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you*, this not only negates knowledge of the unseen from him, but also any power to control what will befall them and him from the realm of the unseen.

But when this verse denies he has knowledge of the unseen, this does not preclude him knowing things about the unseen by way of revelation. This is as God says in numerous places throughout the Qur'an:

These accounts are from the Unseen, which We reveal to you…. (3:44, 12:102)

These are accounts of the Unseen, We reveal them to you…. (11:49)

Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, except to a Messenger He approves of. (72:26–27)

Also in this category is what Jesus says in the verse: *And I will tell you what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses* (3:49), and what Joseph says to his cellmates in prison: *Before the meals you are served come to you, I will inform you of its interpretation. That is among things my Lord has taught me.* (12:37)

The reason there is no contradiction between these two groups of verses is that those verses which deny he or any prophet has knowledge of the unseen are negating it from their human nature. In other words that they have a human nature or a superhuman nature which allows them to have knowledge of the unseen which they can use to win benefits and avoid harm; this would be in the same way that we use normal worldly means. However, there is nothing preventing the unseen being revealed to them by divine instruction through revelation. This is in the same vein

as the miracles which they were given; they did not perform these by any abilities they possessed in of their own selves. Rather all these miracles were performed by God's leave, as He says in response to their demands for signs: *Say: "Immaculate is my Lord! Am I anything but a human, a Messenger*?" (17:93). And elsewhere, he says: *Say: "The signs are only with God, and I am only a manifest warner."* (29:50); and *A Messenger may not bring any sign except by God's permission. Hence when God's edict comes, judgment is made with truth…* (40:87).

This is further attested to by what He says next, *I just follow whatever is revealed to me*. That this statement continues on from his previous one indicates that this is meant as a divergence, in other words: "I don't know anything about these events of the unseen from my own self; rather, I follow what has been revealed to me."

And I am just a manifest warner affirms everything that has come before it in the verse; *I am not a novelty…*, *nor do I know…* and *I just follow…*.

A Philosophical Excursus

Abundant narrations have come down from the Imams of the Prophet's Household saying that God taught the Prophet and the Imams the knowledge of all things. This has been partially explained by saying that the knowledge of the Prophet comes from revelation, while the knowledge of the Imams goes back to the Prophet.

On this subject, accounts of their conduct show that they lived their lives like the people of their time; they pursued their goals in a manner consistent with the mundane means available to them. Sometimes they achieved their goals successfully and sometimes they did not. But if they had knowledge of the unseen then they would have never failed in their efforts, for a sensible person does not avoid a path by which he is certain of success, nor does he take a path by which he is certain of failure.

Moreover, the Imams suffered harms that no human being is allowed to knowingly subject himself to, because this would mean casting themselves into destruction.[1] For example, the Prophet was injured at the Battle of Uḥud, ʿAlī was wounded by his accursed assassin in the Mosque of Kufa and Imam Ḥusayn was slain at Karbala, and all of the other Imams were

1 An allusion to the verse *…and do not cast yourselves with your own hands into destruction…* (2:195). [Trans.]

murdered by poison. If they truly knew what would happen to them, this would mean casting themselves into destruction, and this is forbidden. Moreover, as you can see, this problem also stems from the two verses we have already mentioned: *Had I known the Unseen, I would have acquired much good* (7:188) and *nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you* (46:9).

However, the problem with this line of thinking is that it rests on a faulty understanding of knowledge, in that it confuses ordinary knowledge (*ʿulūm ʿādiyyah*) with extraordinary knowledge (*ʿulūm ghayr ʿādiyyah*); and extraordinary knowledge about the reality of things has no power to alter the course of worldly events.

To explain: Just as our voluntary actions depend upon our will (*irādah*), they also depend on other causes and conditions that are related to matter, time, and place; when all of these factors are in proper alignment with our human will, then the sufficient cause (*ʿillah tāmmah*) for the action is realized and the action is necessarily realized thereby, as it is impossible for an effect not to result from its sufficient cause.

The relation of the action, which is the effect (*maʿlūl*), to its sufficient cause is one of necessity and inevitability (and this is true of the relation between all phenomena and their sufficient causes). Its relation to our will, which is a component of the sufficient cause, is one of possibility and contingency.

This means that all of the external phenomena, including our own voluntary actions as free-willed agents, must necessarily come to pass in objective reality and inevitability occur therein. This does not negate the fact that our voluntary actions are possible in relation to us (that is we can still choose *not* to do them) even though they are necessary on the basis of the above.

So if every phenomenon, including our voluntary actions, is an effect with a sufficient cause that necessitates its coming into being, then these phenomena form a chain of cause-and-effect surrounded by ontological necessity. Not one link in this chain can move out of turn or trade places with another; all of these are ontologically necessary from day one, whether they have already happened in the past, are happening at this very moment, or will happen in the future. Therefore, were we to imagine that someone had complete knowledge of the nature of these phenomena as they are in the text of reality, this would not affect a single link in this chain of phenomena, even to the extent of making a voluntary action

possible instead of necessary.

Now, if you were to argue: But such definitive knowledge (*ʿilm yaqīnī*) plays a role in bringing about voluntary actions, just as any knowledge obtained through ordinary means would. This ordinary knowledge is used to decide whether or not to do an action in such a way that if reality proved contrary to it, then this knowledge itself would be shown to be false.

I would respond: No, because in the scenario we have described the realization of the sufficient cause is necessary for the ordinary knowledge with all the other means of performing a voluntary act. This is like the situation of the obstinate disbelievers who are certain that their obstinacy will take them to hellfire, but they persist in spite of this because it is their own desires that cause this obstinacy. So they have ordinary knowledge that this action is inevitable, as God says in the story of Pharaoh's clan: *They impugned them though they were convinced in their hearts* (27:14).

With this is refuted the claim that it is inconceivable for someone to have absolute certainty that they are wrong without this having any effect on their desires; if knowledge does not have an effect on their desires, this shows that they do not really have certainty. This is because just having knowledge that one is wrong does not necessarily mean that one's desires will now align with that knowledge; it is only knowledge of the fact that one *should* act in a certain way with the soul's resolution to do so that leads to action. We have seen this already in the example of those obstinately persist in disbelieving and denying the truth, even though they are certain about it. This is like acting out of panic; someone who falls from a high branch onto the earth just by thinking of falling from it will not be saved by his knowledge that falling will surely lead to his death.

Some scholars have responded to the original problem by saying that the Prophet and each of the Imams have their own special duties, therefore they must confront these fates, even if this would mean casting themselves into destruction which is ordinarily prohibited. This is alluded to in some traditions.

Others have answered that the knowledge that determines their duties is that obtained by ordinary means. As for extraordinary knowledge, this does not determine their duties. Both of these interpretations can be reconciled with what we have mentioned above.

Commentary continues:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَكَفَرْتُمْ بِهِ وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٌ مِنْ بَنِي

إِسْرَائِيلَ عَلَىٰ مِثْلِهِ فَآمَنَ وَاسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

(46:10) ***Say, "Tell me, if it is from God and you disbelieve in it, and a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to its like and believed, while you are disdainful?" Indeed God does not guide the wrongdoing lot.***

Based on the context, the pronoun *it* in *it is*, *in it*, and *its like* refers to the Qur'an. *And a witness from the Children of Israel* is joined to the antecedent of the conditional sentence *if…* and shares its consequent. The *like* of the Qur'an means its likeness in terms of the divine teachings it contains, and this refers to the original Torah that was sent down to Moses. *And believed, while you are disdainful* means that the aforementioned Israelite witness believed after testifying to it.

Indeed God does not guide the wrongdoing lot: This explains the reason for the consequent for the conditional sentence *if…* which has been left implicit. It appears that the meaning of this consequent is: "If…then are you not astray?" It is not, as some have suggested "If… then are you not wrongdoers?" Because their wrongdoing is the reason God gives for it, so it only makes sense if we assume that that this is explaining their being astray, even though they are described as both wrongdoers and being astray here.

So the verse means: "Say to the idolaters: 'Tell me, if this Qur'an was from God and you have disbelieved in it while a witness from the Children of Israel has born witness to teachings like those of the Qur'an and believed, while you yourselves disdain to do so, then aren't you in error? For surely God does not guide a wrongdoing people.'"

According to some accounts, the one who bore witness to its likeness and believed in it is ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām, one of the Jewish scholars, making this verse Medinan, as he was a resident of that city. Other commentators have said that it is possible that the past tense is used in the phrase *and a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to its like and believed* because it is something that will definitely come to pass, but this is referring to a future event. However this is not a reasonable interpretation because it does not fit the context of the verse, which is presenting arguments to the idolaters. After all, if the idolaters do not believe that

the Prophet is truthful, they are hardly going to accept what he tells them about future events!

There are other interpretations of this verse. For instance, that the one who bore witness to its likeness and believed is Moses; he witnessed the Torah and believed in it. The only reason for commentators to adopt is if they assume that this verse is Meccan while ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām embraced Islam in Medina.

However, first of all: there is no evidence to say that this verse is Meccan. Rather, the account of ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām suggests that it was revealed in Medina. Second, this makes Moses the criterion for these uncivilized idolaters to judge by, meaning God is effectively saying: "Moses believed in the scripture that was sent down to him, but you are too arrogant to believe in the Qur'an!" The foolishness of this is plain to see.

Another reading is that the meaning of likeness in this verse is "the fact of the matter" as God says *Nothing is like His likeness* (42:11), but this is just as unlikely as the previous reading.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَوْ كَانَ خَيْرًا مَا سَبَقُونَا إِلَيْهِ ۚ وَإِذْ لَمْ يَهْتَدُوا بِهِ فَسَيَقُولُونَ هَٰذَا إِفْكٌ قَدِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

(46:11) ***The faithless say to the faithful, "Had it been good, they would not have taken the lead over us toward it." And since they were not guided by it, they will say, "This is an ancient lie."***

It is said: *To* (li) in *to the faithful* is for causation (*taʿlīl*), meaning "on account of their faith", and *toward it* can be interpreted as "in it" (*fī*). *It* in *had it* and *toward it* both refers to the Qur'an from the aspect of believing in it.

This means: "The faithless say about the faithful—on account of their belief—if believing in the Qur'an was any good, the faithful would not have taken the lead over us toward it."

Some commentators have suggested that *the faithful* refers to some of the faithful, and *they* in *they would not have taken the lead* refers to another group. Then the *to* in *say to the faithful* keeps its original meaning, which together makes the meaning: "The faithless tell some of the faithful: 'Had it been good, those other believers would not have taken the lead over us toward it….'" However, this reading is unlikely given the context.

Other commentators have suggested that *the faithful* refers to all the

believers, but when the faithless say *they would have not taken the lead* this is a transition in address; so instead of saying *you* [pl.] *would not have taken the lead…* and this is just as unlikely as the one before it. Moreover, it is not a transition in address to keep speaking to people present while referring to them in the third-person.[1]

And since they were not guided by it, they will say, "This is an ancient lie": *By it* refers to the Qur'an, as does *this*. *Lie* means fabrication. Meaning: If they are not guided by the Qur'an because of their disdain for believing in it, the faithless will say: "This Qur'an is an ancient fabrication." And when they call it *an ancient lie* this is like their saying: *These are nothing but myths of the ancients* (6:25).

وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَىٰ إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً ۚ وَهَٰذَا كِتَابٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِسَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِيُنْذِرَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٢﴾

(46:12) ***Yet before it the Book of Moses was a leader and a mercy, and this is a Book which confirms it, in an Arabic tongue to warn those who do wrong, and is a good news for the virtuous.***

Yet before it appears to be a qualifying sentence (*jumlah ḥāliyyah*). This means: "They will say: 'This is an ancient lie' but the Book of Moses was a guide and a mercy for people before the Qur'an, and this Qur'an is a book confirming it, only in an Arabic tongue as a warning to the wrongdoers and a good news for the virtuous, so how can this be a lie?"

The Torah is described as a leader (*imām*) and a mercy because the Israelites would follow it in their daily lives, and it was a mercy for those who believed in it and followed it in order to reform themselves.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(46:13) ***Indeed those who say, "Our Lord is God," and then go aright, then they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.***

Saying *Our Lord is God* means they affirm and bear witness to the fact that lordship belongs to God alone and that He is the only lord. "Go aright"

1 That is because a transition (*iltifāt*) means that you turn to address *someone else*, not the same person. Otherwise this is not a transition. [Trans.]

(*istaqāmū*) means they hold fast to what they bear witness to without deviating or going astray, and they observe the practical requirements of this.

…then they will have no fear, nor will they grieve. This means there is no possible harm or punishment coming for them which they should fear, nor any harm that befalls them in the form of a punishment or terror for which they should grieve. People only fear harm that may come to them and they only grieve for harm they have suffered. *Then* in *then they will have no fear* is to suggest a conditional relationship between this and the first part of the verse, in other words: Whoever says "Our Lord is God" and then goes aright shall have no fear, etc.

أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(46:14) ***They shall be the companions of paradise, remaining in it—a reward for what they used to do.***

They are called *companions* (aṣḥāb) of paradise in the sense that they will always stay with it. *Remaining in it* is a circumstantial qualifier which further emphasizes the fact that they will never leave it.

So the verses mean: "Those who say 'Our Lord is God' then go aright will remain forever in Paradise as a recompense for their obedience and sacrifice in this world."

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narrators from Abī ʿUbaydah:
I asked Abū Jaʿfar about the verse *Bring me a scripture before this or a trace of knowledge, should you be truthful* (46:4).
He said: "By *a scripture* He means the Torah or the Evangel; by *a trace of knowledge* he means none other than the knowledge of the successors to the prophets."

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad, Ibn Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātam, Ṭabarānī, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Abū Salamah b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, from Ibn ʿAbbās, from the Prophet:
A trace of knowledge means "writing" (*al-khaṭṭ*).

Author's comments: Perhaps by writing he means a written book that has been received from the Prophets or earlier scholars. But in some of the narrations explaining the phrase *or a trace of knowledge* it means something well-written or elegantly written. However this is alien to the context of the argument in the verse.

(3) In ʿ*Uyūn*, in the chapter describing al-Riḍā's meeting with Maʾmūn, he relates from his father, from his grandfather, from their forefathers, from al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī:

The Helpers and the Emigrants met with God's Messenger and said: "O Messenger of God! You are in need of maintenance [for your living] and for those delegations who come to you. This wealth of ours is [yours] with our blood. So dispose of them kindly and gainfully; give whatever you wish and judge whatever you wish without worry!"

So God sent down the Trusted Spirit, who told him: "O Muḥammad! *Say: 'I do not ask you any reward for it except love of relatives.'*" This means: "That you love my near relatives after me." So the people went out and the hypocrites said: "Nothing motivated the Messenger of God to refuse our offer except to encourage us to love his near relatives after him. This is just something he made up in his meeting!" And this is a grave thing for them to say.

Then God sent down the verse: *Do they say, "He has fabricated it?" Say, "Should I have fabricated it, you would not avail me anything against God. He best knows what you gossip concerning it. He suffices as a witness between me and you, and He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful."* (46:8) When he received this verse, the Prophet sent for them and asked: "Did something happen?" They said: "Yes, by God, O Messenger of God! Some of us spoke harsh words that we disliked." Then God's Messenger recited the verse to them and they began to weep profusely. So God sent down the verse: *It is He who accepts the repentance of His servants, and excuses their misdeeds and knows what you do* (42:25).

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Abū Dāwūd narrates in his *Nāsikh* via ʿIkrimah, from Ibn ʿAbbās, about the verse *nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you* (46:9):

This verse was abrogated by the verse in *al-Fatḥ*,[1] so the Prophet came out to give them the good news of what he had been forgiven of sins past and future. Then a man from amongst the faithful said: "Congratulations, O Prophet of God! Now we know what He will do with you, so what will He do with us?" So God

1 Meaning the verse *that God may forgive you what is past of your sin and what is to come* (48:2).

sent down the verse in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb: *Announce to the faithful the good news that there will be for them a great grace from God* (33:47) and He said: *That He may admit the faithful, men and women, into gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them, and that He may absolve them of their misdeeds. That is a great success with God* (48:5). So God made clear what He would do with him and with them.

Author's comments: However, there are several issues with this narration. First of all, we have already explained that the verse *nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you* has nothing to do with knowledge that the Prophet receives by way of revelation, as the Qur'an itself makes clear. So this verse does not negate the Prophet's knowledge of God's forgiveness that he has received by way of revelation in order for it to need abrogating by the verse in Sūrah al-Fatḥ.

Secondly, the apparent meaning of the narration is that the *sin* (*dhanb*) whose forgiveness is promised in the verse from Sūrah al-Fatḥ is sin in the sense of disobeying God's commands and prohibitions. However, it will become clear when we study this verse later that it does not mean this.

Thirdly, there are a vast number of verses indicating that the faithful will enter paradise, in both Meccan and Medinan *sūrah*s, and the two verses of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb do not suggest anything more than what all these other verses describe. So there is no need to single them out to show that the faithful will enter paradise and be encompassed by God's mercy.

Finally, Sūrah al-Aḥzāb was revealed some time before Sūrah al-Fatḥ, and the chronology presented above is not consistent with this.

(5) Abū Yaʿlā, Ibn Jarīr, Ṭabarānī, and Ḥākim narrate a tradition, which Ḥākim declares authentic, with an authentic chain of narration going back to ʿAwf b. Mālik al-Ashjaʿī. He says:

The Prophet set off while I was with him, until we came to the Jewish temple on a festival day of theirs. And they disliked for us to visit them on this occasion.

God's Messenger said to them: "Show me twelve men from amongst you who bear witness that there is no god but God and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. And God will remove His wrath from every Jew beneath the parchment of the heavens." So they went quiet and no one answered him. Then he repeated the offer but no one responded. Then he repeated it a third time and no one responded. So he said: "You refuse! Then by God I am the summoner (*ḥāshir*), I am the follower (*ʿāqib*) and I am the last

(*muqaffī*), whether you believe or deny!"

Then he made to leave while I was with him until we had almost gone out when a man came behind him and said: "As you are, O Muḥammad!" Then he turned around and that man said: "Which man amongst you knows me, O Jews?" They said: "We know of no man more learned about God's book, nor with a better understanding than you, or your father, or your grandfather!" Then he said: "Then I bear witness by God that he is the Prophet that you find in the Torah and the Evangel." They said: "Liar!" Then they rejected him and reviled him. So God's Messenger said: "It is you [pl.] who have lied, and your word will never be accepted."

So we left, the three of us—God's Messenger, myself and Ibn Salām—and then God revealed the verse: *Say, "Tell me, if it is from God and you disbelieve in it, and a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to its like and believed, while you are disdainful?" Indeed God does not guide the wrongdoing lot.*

Author's comments: There are other narrations about ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām which have been narrated through Sunni chains with regard to this verse. However, the context of the verse and the fact God says *from the Children of Israel* means it does not make sense that it should also be addressed to the Israelites. Moreover, this narration counts the Evangel as one of their books when, in fact, they do not believe in it.

Some other narrations say that this verse was revealed about Ibn Yāmīn, who was one of their scholars, when he embraced Islam and the Jews denied him. However, the same problems still apply.

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Verses 15–20

Having divided people into "those who do wrong" (*ẓālimīn*) and the virtuous (*muḥsinīn*) in the verse: *to warn those who do wrong, and as a good news for the virtuous* (46:13), and alluding to the fact that there awaits the wrongdoers something to beware, while there awaits the virtuous something that will gladden them, God turns to discuss this in detail in this section. He says that people will belong to either a people who turn penitently to God and submit to Him (and it is they who will have the best of their deeds accepted, their misdeeds overlooked and will be counted amongst the inhabitants of paradise), or to a people who are losers and against whom the word has become due amongst nations of jinn and men who have passed before them.

The likeness of the first group is one who believes in God and submits to Him, is kind to his parents and asks God to inspire him with gratitude for the blessings He has received, for his parents' wellbeing, to help him do righteous deeds and to set right his descendants. Meanwhile the likeness of the second group is one who reviles his parents when they invite him to believe in God and the Last Day by rebuking them and dismissing their beliefs as nothing more than tales of the ancients.

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا ۖ
وَحَمْلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا ۚ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً قَالَ
رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ
صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَصْلِحْ لِي فِي ذُرِّيَّتِي ۖ إِنِّي تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَإِنِّي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

(46:15) ***We have enjoined man to be kind to his parents. His mother has carried him in travail, and bore him in travail, and his gestation and weaning take thirty months. When he comes of age and reaches forty years, he says, "My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for Your blessing with which You have blessed me and my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds which may please You, and invest my descendants with righteousness. Indeed I have turned to you in penitence, and I am one of the muslims."***

According to al-Rāghib, "to enjoin" (*waṣiyyah*) means to advise a person to behave in a certain way accompanied by admonition. Here it takes the form *tawṣiyyah*, making it doubly transitive, as when God says: *Abraham enjoined this upon his children* (2:132). In both cases, the second object (*mafʿūl*) is accompanied by the particle *bāʾ* and relates to an action. So here, when God says He has enjoined man *to his parents*, He means to an action connected to his parents, namely being kind to them.

There are other opinions regarding the declension (*iʿrāb*) of *kindness* (iḥsānan), including that it is an absolute object, assuming that that the verb *enjoined* implies kindness, so that it is understood to mean: "We have enjoined man to be kind to his parents with kindness." Others say that it is an adjective for an implicit verbal noun in a construct form, meaning, "We enjoined man an enjoining of kindness to his parents." Others still say that it is a purposive object, meaning: "We enjoined man to his parents out of kindness." And there are others beyond this also.

In any case, all of these meanings point to the fact that kindness and dutifulness to one's parents is something that has been ordained in all religious traditions, as we have already seen in our commentary on the verse: *Say, "Come, I will recount what your Lord has forbidden you from. That you shall not ascribe any partners to Him, and you shall be good to the parents…"* (6:151). This is why God says: *We have enjoined man…* as this includes all human beings.

God follows this by highlighting the hardships man's mother goes through in carrying him, bearing him and weaning him, alluding to the wisdom behind this ruling and to inspire his empathy, emotions and mercy, saying: *His mother has carried him in travail, and bore him in travail, and his gestation and weaning take thirty months.* In other words, she carried him with difficulty, referring to his weight, and she bore him with difficulty, referring to the agony of birth.

…and his gestation and weaning take thirty months: This verse takes the shortest possible duration of pregnancy, which is six months, together with the two years of weaning to make thirty months. Elsewhere, God says: *Mothers shall suckle their children for two full years…* (2:233) and: *… and his weaning takes two years* (31:14). Weaning refers to the separation of a child from breastfeeding, and these two years are made the duration of weaning insofar as weaning comes at the end of breastfeeding, and this is only realized at the conclusion of two years.

When he comes of age and reaches forty years: "To come of age"

(*bulūgh al-ashadd*) means the period of time in which a person reaches his full strength, and we have already discussed the different interpretations of this in our commentary on the verse: *When he came of age, We gave him judgement and knowledge…* (12:22). Reaching forty years of age is usually concomitant with the maturing of a person's intellect.

…he says, "My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for Your blessing with which You have blessed me and my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds which may please You: The word used for *inspire* is *īzāᶜ*, yielding the same meaning as *ilhām*. But this inspiration is not of the kind whereby the person is given knowledge of something about which his soul was unaware on account of its nature, as when God says: *by the soul and Him who fashioned it, and inspired it with its virtues and vices* (91:7–8). Rather, this is inspiration to act; meaning a motivation to do good deeds and give thanks; in other words, an inner call to righteous behaviour.

The "blessing" (*niᶜmah*) for which he asks to be inspired to give thanks can refer to any blessing, whether outward—such as life, sustenance, awareness and willpower—or inward—such as belief in God, submission to Him, reliance on Him and trust in Him. So when he says: *My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for Your blessing*, he is asking to be inspired to praise Him by displaying His blessing in word and deed. The meaning of giving thanks in words is obvious. As for giving thanks in deeds, this is by using these blessings in a way that demonstrates that they belong to God and that He is the one who granted them, rather than coming from the person himself. This requires a person to display servanthood (*ᶜubūdiyyah*) in his words and deeds.

The explication of this blessing with the phrase *with which You have blessed me and my parents* shows that he gives thanks from himself for the blessings which he personally enjoys, and also on behalf of his parents for the blessings they were granted. So he is a voice that remembers them and prays for them after they have gone.

His saying *…and that I may do righteous deeds which may please You…* is joined to the phrase *to give thanks for Your blessing*. In fact, this supplication completes the previous supplication as just as thanksgiving (*shukr*) adorns the outward aspect of deeds, righteousness which pleases God adorns their inner aspect and dedicates them to Him.

…and set right for me my descendants: To set right a person's descendants means to invest them with righteousness. This means that God grants them success in performing righteous deeds, leading to the rectification

of their souls. By qualifying this phrase with the words *for me*, this shows that he will benefit from it. In other words, his own children will be kind and dutiful towards him as he was towards his own parents.

To sum up, this is a supplication asking God to inspire him to give thanks for His blessings, do righteous deeds, be kind and dutiful towards his parents, and for his own children to treat him as he did his parents. And we have already said (see the commentary for 3:144 and 7:17) the true meaning of giving thanks for blessings is for the servant to dedicate himself to God. So at the core of this supplication is a request for a pure soul and righteous behaviour.

Indeed I have turned to you in penitence and indeed I am one of the muslims": In other words: "I am one of those who submit the matter to you" such that whenever You desire something they desire it too, or rather they do not desire anything except what you have desired. This sentence serves as an explanation for the contents of the supplication. Moreover, because God not only does not reject this supplication but actually confirms it with His promise: *Such are the ones from whom We accept…* (46:16), this verse shows that when repentance and submission to God are both present, this causes God to inspire His servant to do those things that will make them purified in their hearts (*mukhlaṣīn dhātan*) and dedicated to God in their actions (*mukhliṣīn ʿamalan*). As for the purification of one's heart, we have just referred to this. Meanwhile, the dedication of one's actions is necessary because no act is worthy of God's acceptance or raised up to Him unless it is done purely for God's sake. He says: *Lo! Only exclusive faith is worthy of God* (39:3).

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ نَتَقَبَّلُ عَنْهُمْ أَحْسَنَ مَا عَمِلُوا وَنَتَجَاوَزُ عَنْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ فِي أَصْحَابِ الْجَنَّةِ ۖ وَعْدَ الصِّدْقِ الَّذِي كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(46:16) ***Such are the ones from whom We accept the best of what they do, and overlook their misdeeds, among the inhabitants of paradise—a true promise which they had been given.***

The word used here for "accept"—*taqabbal*—is more eloquent than using the common word *qabūl*, meaning "approved". *The best of what they do* means their acts of obedience in obligatory and supererogatory things, for these are accepted and approved of. As for morally neutral deeds (*mubāḥāt*), even if they are good, they are not "accepted," as has

been noted in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* in connection with the explanation of the term "good" (*ḥasan*). This is supported by the contrast between *We accept the best of what they do…* with *…and overlook their misdeeds.* It is as if to say: "Their virtuous deeds, in the form of obligations and supererogatory acts, are the best of their deeds, so we will accept them. And we will overlook their misdeeds." As for that which is neither an act of obedience, nor a good deed, it has nothing to do with being accepted or anything else.

…among the inhabitants of paradise is semantically connected to *overlook their misdeeds*. In other words, we will overlook their misdeeds amongst those inhabitants of paradise whose misdeeds we will overlook, making the phrase a circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*) for *from whom*.

…a true promise which they had been given: This means that with this statement God has given them a true promise which until now they have been given upon the tongues of His prophets and messengers. Alternatively, it could mean that by virtue of this acceptance of their good deeds and overlooking of their misdeeds, God is giving them a true promise for the Day of Judgement which they were promised in this world.

وَالَّذِى قَالَ لِوَالِدَيْهِ أُفٍّ لَكُمَا أَتَعِدَانِنِى أَنْ أُخْرَجَ وَقَدْ خَلَتِ الْقُرُونُ
مِنْ قَبْلِى وَهُمَا يَسْتَغِيثَانِ اللَّهَ وَيْلَكَ آمِنْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَيَقُولُ مَا
هَٰذَا إِلَّا أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

(46:17) ***As for him who says to his parents, "Fie on you! Do you promise me that I shall be brought forth when generations have passed away before me?" And they invoke God's help: "Woe to you! Believe! Indeed God's promise is true." But he says, "These are nothing but myths of the ancients."***

Above, the Qur'an describes a person who turns penitently towards God, submits to Him and asks Him for purity of heart, sincerity of action, fidelity to his parents and investing his descendants with righteousness. It now juxtaposes this with a person who disbelieves in God, His Messenger and the Resurrection and reviles his parents when they invite him to believe and warn him of the Resurrection.

As for him who says to his parents… appears to be the subject of a nominal sentence and, although grammatically singular, plural in meaning. Its predicate is *Such are the ones against whom…* (46:18). *Fie…!* (*uff*) is

an expression of annoyance which conveys a meaning of anger and exasperation. *Do you promise me that I shall be brought forth…* is a rhetorical question intended as a rebuke, meaning: "Do you promise me that I shall be brought forth from my grave alive and taken to judgement?" In other words: "Do you warn me of the Resurrection?" *…when generations have passed away before me?* Meaning: "While it is the case that peoples from the past who were alive before me have perished and none of them have been revived or brought back?"

This rests on their supposed argument against the Resurrection, namely that if there was going to be a resurrection, some of those who perished in the past would have been brought back by now; these people are beyond counting and have been dead since time immemorial, and yet there is neither any account of them nor any trace! Of course, the ones who make this argument do not pay attention to the fact that if such people were brought back to life it would be in this world, while the resurrection that God has promised will only happen in the Hereafter, in a new creation that is not this world.

And they invoke God's help: "Woe to you! Believe! Indeed God's promise is true": In other words, he says this while his parents are asking God to grant them succor and support to convince him and incline him towards faith. They say to him: "Woe to you! Believe in God and what the Messenger has brought"—and part of this is God's promise of the Resurrection—"God's promise of the Resurrection which He has sent through His messengers is true!"

This shows that when they tell him *Believe!*, they mean to believe in God, in His Messenger and what His Messenger has brought from Him. They say *Indeed God's promise is true*, and this shows the reason why they are enjoining him to believe in Him, in order to warn him of what is to come.

But he says, "These are nothing but myths of the ancients": *These* refers to either the promise that they have mentioned and warned him of or the entire religion to which they were inviting him. This makes the meaning: "This person will tell his parents: 'This promise of which you warn me…' or 'This religion to which you invite me… is nothing but superstitions of the ancients!'" And *the ancients* (al-awwalīn) means the earliest and most primitive nations.

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَوْلُ فِي أُمَمٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنَ الْجِنِّ

وَالْإِنْسِ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا خَاسِرِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

(46:18) ***Such are the ones against whom the word became due concerning the nations that have passed away before them of jinn and humans. They were indeed the losers.***

We have discussed some of the meanings of this in our commentary on Sūrah Fuṣṣilat (41), verse 25.

وَلِكُلٍّ دَرَجَاتٌ مِمَّا عَمِلُوا ۖ وَلِيُوَفِّيَهُمْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(46:19) ***For each there will be degrees pertaining to what he has done that He may recompense them fully for their works, and they will not be wronged.***

In other words, for each of those who have been mentioned—the virtuous faithful and the vicious disbelievers—are different stations and levels, ascending and descending; paradise has ascending levels (*darajāt*), while hell has descending ones (*darakāt*).

This distinction results from the differences in their own souls, even if this is only apparent from their actions, which is why God says: *For each there will be degrees pertaining to what he has done*. The degrees are theirs, but their source is their actions.

…that He may recompense them fully for their works, and they will not be wronged. *That…* signifies the purpose of the above sentence, and the sentence that follows is semantically connected to one or more implicit purposes whose mention would serve no purpose here. This is only has been made a purpose for God's saying *for each there will be degrees* because this means "we will make them into degrees." So the meaning is: "We have made them into degrees for such and such reasons, and to recompense them fully for their works, and they will not be wronged."

To *recompense* them for their deeds means to give them those same deeds [in another form], making this one of the verses indicating that a person's deeds will take on a physical reality in the Hereafter (*tajassum al-aʿmāl*). It is said: This statement implicitly means: "That we may recompense them fully with the wages for their works."

وَيَوْمَ يُعْرَضُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَلَى النَّارِ أَذْهَبْتُمْ طَيِّبَاتِكُمْ فِي حَيَاتِكُمُ

الدُّنْيَا وَاسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ بِهَا فَالْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(46:20) ***The day when the faithless are exposed to the Fire, [they will be told,] "You have exhausted your good things in the life of the world and enjoyed them. So today you will be requited with a humiliating punishment for your acting arrogantly in the earth unduly, and because you used to transgress."***

Water is "offered" (*ʿaraḍ*) to an animal when it is placed in front of it so that if it wishes to drink it may drink, and wares are "offered" for sale when they are put on display for someone to purchase.

It is said: The faithless being offered the Fire means when they are punished in it, similar to how when one says "so-and-so was offered the sword", it means that person was killed. This is a common figure of speech.

However, this does not accord with the meaning of the following statement at the end of the *sūrah*: *The day when the faithless are offered to the Fire, "Is this not a fact?" They will say, "Yes, by our Lord!" He will say, "So taste the punishment…!"* This is because it makes tasting the punishment follow on from their being offered to the fire, indicating that their being offered to the fire and punishment are two different things.

It is said: The verse contains an inversion. Originally, the fire should have been offered to those who disbelieve, as the one to whom something is offered should be able to perceive the offering. However, the fire does not perceive those who disbelieve. Quite the opposite! But since they are the ones journeying towards the fire, their position was inverted in the statement.

However there are a number of issues here. As for the assertion that the one to whom something is offered must be able to perceive and apprehend the offering to either desire it or be averse to it and the accompanying claim that the fire has no such perception: First of all, this claim is impossible, or else people could not say "I offered the wares for sale" and the Qur'an would not say: *Indeed We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains…* (33:72). Secondly, we do not accept the assertion that the fires of hell are without senses, as authentic narrations indicate that paradise and hell have senses. This is alluded to by the verse: *The day when We shall say to hell, "Are you full?" It will say, "Is there any*

more?" (50:30) and other verses beside it.

As for the claim that the offering must move towards the offered-to, we also do not accept the necessity of this or its consequences. It is contradicted by God's words: *Indeed We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains…* and that other verses of the Qur'an actually suggest that hell will be brought towards those who disbelieved: *the day when hell is brought, on that day man will take admonition but what will the admonition avail him?* (89:23)

The truth is that "offering", which is to show that there is nothing preventing one thing being received by another, signifies a relation (*nisbah*) between two parties, either one of which can be the principal offered-to (*maʿrūḍ ʿalayh*) with the other being the ancillary offering (*maʿrūḍ*). This means that sometimes the fire is offered to the faithless, signifying that there is no good deed or intercession to prevent them from entering it. This is like God's saying: *and that day We shall bring hell into view visibly for the faithless* (18:100). But at other times, the faithless are offered to the fire, signifying that there is nothing to prevent the fire from punishing them, as when God says: *the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening* (40:46) and when He says in this *sūrah*: *The day when the faithless are offered the Fire.…*

With this in mind, it seems most likely that there will be two instances of offering on the Day of Resurrection; hell will be offered to the faithless when it comes into view and they will be offered to hell after they have been weighed and judged by sending them into it when they are driven towards it: *The faithless will be driven to hell in throngs* (39:71).

…You have exhausted your good things in the life of the world and enjoyed them: Implying that this will be said to them. *Good things* means those things which are in harmony with the soul (*nafs*) and agreeable to nature (*ṭabʿ*), from which the human being derives pleasure. By having *exhausted* these good things, this means you have been given them in full; *enjoyed them* means to have used them for their own sake rather than for the sake of preparing for the Hereafter.

This means: When they are offered to the fire, they will be told: "You have exhausted the good things you took enjoyment from in your worldly lives; you used them up and left nothing for yourselves to enjoy in the Hereafter!"

So today you will be requited with a humiliating punishment for your acting arrogantly in the earth unduly, and because you used to transgress: This follows logically from exhausting their good things. A humiliating

punishment is one that entails humiliation and disgrace.

This means: "So today you will be requited with a punishment containing humiliation and disgrace in return for your disdain for the truth in this world and in return for your transgression and your turning aside from obeying God." These are two sins; disdain for the truth is connected to beliefs, while transgression is connected to actions.

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Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from ʿAbd al-Razzāq, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd and Ibn Mundhir via Qatādah from Abū Ḥarb b. Abī al-Aswad al-Duʾalī:

A case was brought to ʿUmar of a woman who had given birth to a child at six months [after marriage]. So he consulted the Companions of the Prophet about her and ʿAlī said: "There is no stoning for her, do you not see that He says: …*and his gestation and weaning take thirty months*… (46:15) and …*and his weaning takes two years* (31:14)? The pregnancy here was six months." So ʿUmar left her [without punishment].

Then the narrator said:

Then word reached us that she had given birth to another child after six months of pregnancy.

Author's comments: And Mufīd narrates this in his *Irshād*.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim relate from Baʿjah b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Jahanī:

A man from amongst us married a woman from the Juhaynah tribe. She gave birth to a fully-formed child after six months, so her husband went to ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, and he ordered her to be stoned. Word of this reached ʿAlī, so he came and said: "What are you doing?"

He said: "She gave birth to a fully-formed child at six months [of marriage]. Is such a thing possible?"

ʿAlī said: "Have you not heard God's words: …*and his gestation and weaning take thirty months*… (46:15) and *Mothers shall suckle their children for two full years*… (2:233), so [when you deduct two years from thirty months], how much remains besides six months?"

ʿUthmān replied: "By God I had not noticed this! I must get to her!" But when they reached her they found they had finished

with her. One of the things she had told her sister was: "Do not grieve, for by God I have never given myself to anyone except him!" Then the boy grew up and the husband acknowledged him as his son—he was, after all, a clear likeness of his father.
The narrator added:
I saw the man later, bedridden and gradually suffering paralysis of the body, limb after limb.

(3) And in *Tahdhīb*, with a chain of narrators via ᶜAbd Allāh b. Sinān from Abū ᶜAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq], who said:
Once when I was with my father [Imām al-Bāqir], he was asked about God's saying: *When he comes of age* (46:15). He replied: "Puberty (*iḥtilām*)."

(4) In *Khiṣāl*, Abū Baṣīr narrates from Abū ᶜAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:
When a person reaches thirty-three years, he has come of age. When he reaches forty years, he has reached his utmost; once he enters forty-one years, his decline has begun. And it behoves a person of fifty years to be like one whose soul is being taken away.

Author's comments: These narrations seem to suggest that coming of age has different levels, with puberty (which usually finishes at about sixteen years of age) being the first, and thirty-three years (meaning after another sixteen years have passed) being the second. Some narrations have already been mentioned concerning a similar verse in Sūrat Yūsuf (see 12:22).

And know that there have been narrations about this verse that apply to al-Ḥusayn b. ᶜAlī who was born after six months of pregnancy, which is an application (*jarī*).

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from ᶜAbd Allāh:
I was in the mosque when Marwān[1] gave a sermon and said: "God has given the Commander of the Faithful a good opinion of Yazīd. And if he appoints him as his successor, then Abū Bakr also appointed ᶜUmar as one."
Whereat ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr said: "Is he a Heraclius?[2]

1 This is Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, who served as governor of Medina under Muᶜāwiyah.

2 The name of the Roman emperor at the time of the Prophet.

By God, Abū Bakr did not appoint one of his children or family members as a successor! Muʿāwiyah has only done this to help and aggrandize his son!"

Marwān said: "Are you not the one who said to his parents: 'Fie on you'?"

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān replied: "Are you not the son of the accursed, whose father was cursed by God's Messenger?"

The narrator said:

And I heard ʿĀʾishah say: "O Marwān! Did you say such-and-such to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān? By God, you lie! It was not revealed about him but about someone else."

However, Ibn Jarīr relates from Ibn ʿAbbās concerning the one who said "Fie on you!" to his parents: "This was one of Abū Bakr's sons."

Author's comments: This has also been narrated from Qatādah and Sudayy and the story of Marwān narrating this, and ʿĀʾishah's rebuke is famous.

(6) In *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, after rejecting the narration of Marwān, the author says:

And some notable scholars like al-Suhaylī agree with Marwān in his claim that this verse came down about ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. However, even if we accept this account, there is no sense in this attack, especially when it comes from someone like Marwān. After all, the man had embraced Islam and was one of the most distinguished Companions; he demonstrated his concern for Islam at the Battle of Yamāmah and others. Islam effaces whatever came before it; when a disbeliever embraces Islam, he should not be reproached for what he used to say.

However, if the narrations are authentic, this does not provide an escape for the explicit testimony of the verse against him when He says: *Such are the ones against whom the word became due… They were indeed the losers.* (46:18) And nothing of that which he says to defend him is of any avail.

(7) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the words *The day when the faithless are offered the Fire… and enjoyed them* (46:20), we read:

You ate, drank and rode. And this refers to the clan of so-and-so, s*o today you will be requited with a humiliating punishment*, meaning thirst.

(8) In *Maḥāsin*, Ibn al-Qaddāḥ narrates from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq], from his forefathers:
The Prophet was brought some *khabīṣ*[1] but he refused to eat it. Someone asked: "Do you forbid it?"
He said: "No, but I dislike that my soul (*nafs*) should crave it."
Then he recited the verse: "*You have exhausted your good things in the life of the world*" (46:20).

(9) Concerning this verse in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:
It is narrated in a tradition that ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said: "I sought permission to see God's Messenger, so I came upon him in the watering hole of Umm Ibrāhīm, and he was reclining with part of him resting on Ḥafṣah and part on the ground. Under his head was a pillow stuffed with fibres. I greeted him then sat and said: 'O Messenger of God, you are God's Prophet, chosen and favoured by Him amongst all His creatures, yet Khosrow and Caesar are upon beds of gold and rugs of silk and brocade'
"Then God's Messenger said: 'They are a people who have hastened to claim their good things, and they are about to run out. But for us, our good things have been kept for later!'"

Author's comments: It is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from him as well.

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1 A kind of sweet.

Verses 21–28

In the previous section, God divided people into two groups. Now the discourse turns to warn people by referring to two accounts; first, that of ʿĀd's people and their destruction and, with it, the destruction of a village in the vicinity of Mecca. The second is the account of a group of the jinn dispatched by God to the Prophet who listened to the Qur'an and believed in it before returning to warn their people. These two stories are only presented here for those who want to take a lesson from them. The verses we are about to discuss contain the first of these two accounts.

وَاذْكُرْ أَخَا عَادٍ إِذْ أَنْذَرَ قَوْمَهُ بِالْأَحْقَافِ وَقَدْ خَلَتِ النُّذُرُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ
وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ
عَظِيمٍ ﴿٢١﴾

(46:21) ***And mention [Hūd] the brother of ʿĀd, when he warned his people at Aḥqāf—and warners have passed away in front of him and behind him—saying, "Do not worship anyone but God. Indeed I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day."***

The brother of a particular people means someone who is related to them through his father. *The brother of ʿĀd* refers to the Prophet Hūd, and Aḥqāf was their abode. It is certain that they lived in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, but there is no trace of them today. Commentators have disagreed where exactly this was. Some say it was in a valley between Oman and Mahra (Eastern Yemen), while others say it was the dunes between Oman and Hadhramaut. Others still say it is a stretch of dunes overlooking the sea near Shihr in Yemen. There have been other suggestions too.

…and warners have passed away in front of him and behind him… Based on the context, *warners* refers to messengers. As for those who expand the scope of "warners" to include both messengers and the scholars who are their deputies, this is not the proper place for that.

They have explained *in front of him* as referring to those before him and *behind him* as meaning those who came after him, although the

opposite is also possible by reading *in front of him* as referring to those who were in his time and *behind him* meaning those who came beforehand. For the first reading, it is most appropriate to understand *in front of him and behind him* to mean that he came to them and warned them after a gap in messengers.

…saying, "Do not worship anyone but God: This expounds the nature of his warning. It also alludes to the fact that the foundation of religion to which all its particularities return is Divine Unity.

…Indeed I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day": This explains the reason why he is calling them to Divine Unity, and apparently *a tremendous day* refers to the punishment of being wiped out in this world rather than the Day of Resurrection. This is shown by what they say next—*Then bring us what you threaten us*! (46:22)—and his saying; *Rather it is what you sought to hasten* (46:24). The remainder of the meaning is clear.

قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا لِتَأْفِكَنَا عَنْ آلِهَتِنَا فَأْتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(46:22) ***They said, "Have you come to turn us away from our gods? Then bring us what you threaten us with, should you be truthful."***

This is the response of Hūd's people to his preaching. The word *turn us away* (ta'fikanā) is derived from the root *ifk* meaning falsehood and calumny, but here is used in the sense of diverting. So the meaning is: "Have you come to turn us away from our Gods falsely and slanderously?"

Then bring us what you threaten us with, should you be truthful: They challenge Hūd to invoke the punishment, seeking to demonstrate his inability to do so and thereby expose him as a fraud and a liar in his preaching.

قَالَ إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأُبَلِّغُكُمْ مَا أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ وَلَكِنِّي أَرَاكُمْ قَوْمًا تَجْهَلُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(46:23) ***He said, "The knowledge is with God alone. I communicate to you what I have been sent with. But I see that you are a senseless lot."***

This is Hūd's response to their challenge and a repudiation of them. He says *the knowledge is with God alone*, which limits the knowledge of when this punishment will befall them to God because it belongs to the Unseen whose reality is known only to God. This alludes to the fact that Hūd has no knowledge of what the punishment is, or how or when it will take place. That is why he follows this by saying: *I communicate to you what I have been sent with.* In other words, I communicate whatever I have been given to bring you; I have no knowledge of the punishment I have been commanded to warn you of—what is it, how will it happen, when will it be? I have no power to answer these questions.

…But I see that you are a senseless lot: Here he turns aside from what he was saying before about not having any knowledge. It means: "I have no knowledge of the punishment you are hastening but I can see that you are a senseless people; you do not distinguish between what will help you and what will harm you, or what is good and what is evil, as you reject the call of God, deny His signs and mock the punishment He warns you of."

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهُ عَارِضًا مُسْتَقْبِلَ أَوْدِيَتِهِمْ قَالُوا هَٰذَا عَارِضٌ مُمْطِرُنَا ۚ بَلْ هُوَ مَا اسْتَعْجَلْتُمْ بِهِ ۖ رِيحٌ فِيهَا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

(46:24) *When they saw it as a cloud advancing toward their valleys, they said, "This cloud brings us rain." "Rather it is what you sought to hasten: a hurricane carrying a painful punishment,*

This describes the punishment as it descended towards them and how it appeared in their eyes. The word used for cloud here is *ʿāriḍ* which means a cloud that appears on the horizon and then covers the sky. The phrase *as a cloud* is an adjective for *it*, as is *advancing toward their valleys*. When they said "*This cloud brings us rain*," this shows they actually became happy because they thought that the cloud was going to bring rain and said: "What we are seeing is a cloud that is bringing rain for us."

"Rather it is what you sought to hasten, a hurricane carrying a painful punishment: This refutes their saying *this cloud brings us rain* by turning aside from it (saying *rather…*) to expound the reality of the situation. First, this shows that this is the divine punishment by deriding them, saying, "This is what you sought to hasten when you said, '*Then bring us what you threaten us with, should you be truthful.*'" Second, he explains the nature of the punishment, adding: *a hurricane carrying a painful punishment*.

The speaker here is God, although some have said it is the speech of the Prophet Hūd.

تُدَمِّرُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ بِأَمْرِ رَبِّهَا فَأَصْبَحُوا لَا يُرَىٰ إِلَّا مَسَاكِنُهُمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الْقَوْمَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(46:25) ***destroying everything by its Lord's command." So they became such that nothing could be seen except their dwellings. Thus do We requite the guilty lot.***

Destroying (*tadmīr*) means wiping out (*ihlāk*). By making *everything* (kulla shayʾ) its object, this would suggest general destruction. However, the context narrows this to include just people, animals and property, rather than the land as a whole. This renders the meaning: "That wind is the wind that destroys all people, animals and property in its path."

So they became such that nothing could be seen except their dwellings—this describes the result of the punishment.

Thus do We requite the guilty lot—this offers a general rule for requiting the guilty by drawing a general comparison to an exemplary case; in this case, the comparison is being drawn to the severity of the punishment. In other words, "Our habit when we requite the guilty is in this way, whose severity we have just recounted." This is like when God says, *Such is the seizing of your Lord when He seizes the townships that are wrongdoing. Indeed His seizing is painful, severe* (11:102).

وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِيمَا إِنْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِيهِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ سَمْعًا وَأَبْصَارًا وَأَفْئِدَةً فَمَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُمْ سَمْعُهُمْ وَلَا أَبْصَارُهُمْ وَلَا أَفْئِدَتُهُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِذْ كَانُوا يَجْحَدُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(46:26) ***Certainly We had granted them power in respects that We have not granted you, and We had vested them with hearing and sight and hearts. But neither their hearing availed them nor did their sight, nor their hearts, in any way when they used to impugn the signs of God. So they were besieged by what they used to deride.***

This is an admonition for the disbelievers in Mecca which is drawn from the account given above. "To establish" (*tamkīn*) literally means to settle something and make it firm; here, it alludes to giving them power

and the ability to act upon the world. The meaning is: "We certainly made the people of Hūd superior to you, O disbelievers of Mecca, in physical strength, vigor, might and power as a people."

…and We had vested them with hearing and sight and hearts: In other words, we endowed them with faculties that would enable them to apprehend what brings them benefit and harm, namely hearing and sight, and what allows them to distinguish between the two, so that they could use these faculties to win benefit and repel harm for themselves. And we gave these faculties to you too.

But neither their hearing availed them nor did their sight, nor their hearts, in any way when they used to impugn the signs of God: In short, this means: They were given power that has not been granted to you, and they had all the faculties of perception and discernment which a person uses to repel harm and protect him from visible dangers. But these senses and faculties did not avail them or benefit them in any way when they stubbornly rejected God's signs. So, O disbelievers of Mecca, what reason have you to feel safe from God's punishment when you obstinately deny His signs?

It is said that this verse means: We established them in the same way we established you, with power and strength. And gave them hearing, sights and hearts so that they could use these for the purposes for which we created them; so that they could hear the word of truth, see the signs of Divine Unity and take admonition by pondering on lessons. Then, by using their intellects, they could correctly deduce that they had an Origin and a Destination. However, their hearing, sights and hearts were of no use to them because they did not use them to obtain knowledge of God.

However, what we have mentioned above is more appropriate to the context.

Some commentators have interpreted words in the verse in various ways, but we have not seen it worthwhile to mention them here.

And we have mentioned in other places where the words "hearing, sights and hearts" appear that the word *hearing* (samʿ) is used in the singular—while the intended meaning is plural—because it originally has the meaning of a verbal noun, like the Arabic words *ḍayf* ("guest"), *qurbān* ("sacrifice"), and *junub* ("ritually impure"). Elsewhere, God says: *Did you receive the story of Abraham's honoured guests (*ḍayf*)?* (51:24); *When the two of them offered offerings (*qurbān*)* (5:27); *If you* [pl.] *are junub* [sing.] (5:6).

So they were besieged by what they used to deride: This is joined to

but neither their hearing availed them.

وَلَقَدْ أَهْلَكْنَا مَا حَوْلَكُمْ مِنَ الْقُرَىٰ وَصَرَّفْنَا الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(46:27) ***Certainly We destroyed towns that were around you and We have disposed the signs so that they may come back.***

This is a reminder and a warning that follows from the admonition *Certainly We had established them…* so it is joined to this rather than *And mention the brother of ʿĀd…* (46:21).

…and We have disposed the signs so that they may come back. In other words, We have made different signs—such as the miracles with which We supported the Prophets, the revelation We sent down to them and the blessings We have provided them with—in order that people take a lesson from them, and We have tried them with hardships so that they might repent and turn aside from their wrongdoing. All of this is in the hope that they will come back to worship God alone instead of worshipping others.

"They" in *So that they may come back* refers to the villages, meaning their inhabitants.

فَلَوْلَا نَصَرَهُمُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قُرْبَانًا آلِهَةً ۖ بَلْ ضَلُّوا عَنْهُمْ ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ إِفْكُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(46:28) ***So why did not those [false gods] help them whom they had taken, besides God, as gods, as means of nearness [to Him]? Rather they forsook them; and that was their lie and what they used to fabricate.***

From the context, *as gods* is the second object for the verb *they took*, with the first object being *those*. And this statement is meant as derision, in other words: "Why didn't those they took as gods help them even though they were using them to seek nearness to God, as they say: '*We only worship them so that they may bring us near to God*' (39:3)."

Rather they forsook them…: Meaning that the gods forsook the inhabitants of the villages. In other words, the bond of lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) and servanthood (*ʿubūdiyyah*), which they had professed and which they had expected to save them in times of hardship, was broken. The fact that

their gods "forsook" them refers to the falsity of their claims.

…and that was their lie and what they used to fabricate: This refers to their gods forsaking them. *That was their lie* means that it was the effect of their lie, and *what* here is used in the sense of a verbal noun (i.e. "their fabrication").

This means: "That their gods forsook them was a result of their lying and fabrication."

We can also read this statement in another way, namely as referring to their destruction after being presented with God's signs and their gods forsaking them. In this case, the meaning can be rendered thus: "The fate we have mentioned for them here is the reality of their claim that their gods will intercede on their behalf and bring them closer to God which is a lie and fabrication they contrived." This also is a derision.

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Verses 29–35

This is the second account, which follows on from that of ʿĀd, to serve as an admonition for the Prophet's people. It also serves as a stinging rebuke of them in that they disbelieved in him and in the scripture that was revealed to him in their language, which they knew was a miraculous sign. This was while they were human beings like him, and yet when the jinn heard the Qur'an, they believed in it and returned to their people to warn them.

وَإِذْ صَرَفْنَا إِلَيْكَ نَفَرًا مِنَ الْجِنِّ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقُرْآنَ فَلَمَّا حَضَرُوهُ قَالُوا
أَنْصِتُوا ۖ فَلَمَّا قُضِيَ وَلَّوْا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِمْ مُنْذِرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(46:29) ***When We dispatched toward you a team of jinn listening to the Qur'an. When they were in its presence, they said, "Be silent!" When it was finished, they went back to their people as warners.***

To "dispatch" (*ṣarf*) means to drive something from one state to another or from one place to another. A "team" (*nafar*)—based on what Rāghib has said—literally means a group of men still small enough to escape notice, and it can be applied to any group of three or more men, women, humans, or jinn, as in this verse. *Listening to the Qur'an* is an adjective for *a team*.

The meaning is: "And mention when we directed to you a number of the jinn listening to the Qur'an."

…when they were in its presence, they said, "Be silent!"

Its presence means the presence of the Qur'an, and this intimates a sense of activity (i.e. its recitation). *Silent* means to be quiet in order to listen. In other words, when they attended the Qur'an's recitation, they said to one another: "Be silent so that we may listen properly!"

When it was finished, they turned to their people as warners.

It means the Qur'an, in the sense of its recitation and reading. *Turned* means that they departed. *As warners* is a circumstantial qualifier for the plural pronoun in *they turned*. In other words, when the recitation had finished completely, they departed to their people to warn them of God's

punishment.

قَالُوا يَا قَوْمَنَا إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا كِتَابًا أُنْزِلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَىٰ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ وَإِلَىٰ طَرِيقٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

(46:30) ***They said, "O our people! Indeed we have heard a Book which has been sent down after Moses, confirming what was before it. It guides to the truth and to a straight path.***

Here God relates what they said to their people when they invited them to believe and warned them. *A Book which has been sent down after Moses* means the Qur'an, and this statement would appear to suggest that they were believers in Moses and his scripture. *Confirming what was before it* means either that it confirms the Torah or all the heavenly scriptures.

It guides to the truth and to a straight path: In other words, it guides whoever follows it to the path of truth, to a straight path from which no one who walks upon it will stray in their beliefs or actions.

يَا قَوْمَنَا أَجِيبُوا دَاعِيَ اللَّهِ وَآمِنُوا بِهِ يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُجِرْكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٣١﴾

(46:31) ***O our people! Respond to God's summoner and have faith in Him. He will forgive you of your sins and shelter you from a painful punishment."***

God's summoner is the Prophet. Elsewhere, God says: *This is my way. I summon to God with insight…* (12:108). Some have suggested that it refers to what they had heard of the Qur'an, but this is unlikely.

The apparent meaning of the word *of* (min) in *He will forgive you of your sins* is partitioning (*tabʿīḍ*), in other words: "He will forgive you some of your sins" meaning "those that they earned before you believed." God says: *…if they relinquish, what is already past shall be forgiven them* (8:38).

It is said: This means some of God's rights over them, for these are forgiven through repentance, and believing is a kind of repentance. As for the rights they owe to people, these are not forgiven through repentance. However, this reading is refuted by the fact that Islam effaces whatever came before it.

وَمَنْ لَا يُجِبْ دَاعِيَ اللَّهِ فَلَيْسَ بِمُعْجِزٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ دُونِهِ

أَوْلِيَاءُ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

(46:32) ***Those who do not respond to God's summoner cannot thwart [God] on the earth, and they will not find any protectors besides Him. They are in manifest error.***

Meaning, whoever does not believe in God's summoner cannot thwart God upon the earth by rejecting his preaching, and they will not have any protectors besides God to help them and support them in that. In short, someone who does not respond to the summoner's call only hurts himself; he does not impair God's plan in any way, whether by himself or even with the help of others, which is why he has no protector besides God. That is why God finishes by saying: …*They are in manifest error*.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَمْ يَعْيَ بِخَلْقِهِنَّ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يُحْيِيَ الْمَوْتَىٰ ۚ بَلَىٰ إِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

(46:33) ***Do they not see that God, who created the heavens and the earth and was not exhausted by their creation, is able to revive the dead? Yes, indeed He has power over all things.***

This verse and all the ones that follow it until the end of the sūrah are connected to the previous verse: *The day when the faithless are offered the Fire, "You have exhausted…"* (46:20). They finish off the discussion of the warning this *sūrah* contains, namely the Resurrection and the return to God, as we have already explained.

Here, *see* means to know something through insight. *Exhausted* means to be rendered impotent or to become tired, but the first is more eloquent based on what has been said. In the Arabic text, the *bāʾ* in …*is able to…* (bi qādirin) is additional (*zāʾidah*) because it is attached to a predicate following a negative clause (*Do they not see…*), as if to say: "Is not God able…?" (*a laysa allāhu bi qādirin…*?).

The verse means: "And do they not know that God, who created the heavens and the earth and was not unable to create them (or was not tired out by creating them) is able to revive the dead—when He is the origin of everything's existence and life? Of course he is able, because He has power over all things!" And we have explained this style of argument more than once already.

وَيَوْمَ يُعْرَضُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَلَى النَّارِ أَلَيْسَ هَٰذَا بِالْحَقِّ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّنَا ۚ قَالَ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(46:34) ***The day when the faithless are exposed to the Fire, "Is this not a fact?" They will say, "Yes, by our Lord!" He will say, "So taste the punishment because of what you used to disbelieve."***

This affirms the argument in the previous verse by foretelling what will happen to those who deny the Resurrection on the Day of Judgement. The meaning of the verse is clear.

فَاصْبِرْ كَمَا صَبَرَ أُولُو الْعَزْمِ مِنَ الرُّسُلِ وَلَا تَسْتَعْجِلْ لَهُمْ ۚ كَأَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ مَا يُوعَدُونَ لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا سَاعَةً مِنْ نَهَارٍ ۚ بَلَاغٌ ۚ فَهَلْ يُهْلَكُ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(46:35) ***So be patient just as the resolute among the Messengers were patient, and do not seek to hasten [the punishment] for them. The day when they see what they are promised, [it will be] as though they had remained only an hour of a day. This is a proclamation. So shall anyone be destroyed except the transgressing lot?***

This verse seeks to draw a conclusion (with *So…*) from the reality of the Resurrection which has been demonstrated through rational arguments and which God has foretold of and negated all doubt from.

It means: So be patient with the denial of those disbelievers and their refusal to believe in that Day, just as the resolute amongst the Messengers were patient. And do not hasten the punishment for them, because they will surely encounter it and the punishment it carries; it is not a day that is far-off for them, even if they imagine it to be so.

The day when they see what they are promised, as though they had remained only an hour of a day: This illustrates just how close that day is to them and their worldly lives by describing their condition when they witness that day; when they see what they have been promised on that day and what kind of punishments have been prepared for them, their condition will be like that of someone who had spent only an hour of a day upon the earth.

This is a proclamation. So shall anyone be destroyed except the

transgressing lot?: In other words: This Qur'an and the explanation it contains is a proclamation from God sent by way of prophethood. So will anyone be destroyed in the manner God has conveyed except the transgressing people who cast off the cloak of servanthood?

In this verse, God has commanded his Prophet to be patient just as the Resolute Messengers (*rusul ūlū al-ʿazm*) before him were patient. This alludes to the fact that the Prophet is himself one of these messengers, so he should be patient as they were. The meaning of "resolute" (*ʿazm*) here is either patience, as some have understood the following verse to mean: *As for him who endures patiently and forgives—that is indeed the steadiest of courses (*ʿazm al-umūr*)* (46:43). Or it could mean resolution to fulfil the pledge taken from the Prophets, as God alludes to in the verse: *Certainly We had enjoined Adam earlier; but he forgot, and We did not find any resoluteness in him* (20:115). Finally, it could also mean resolution (*ʿazīmah*), meaning governance (*ḥukm*) and law (*sharīʿah*).

According to the third meaning, which is the correct one according to the narrations of the Imāms of the Prophet's Household, these Resolute Messengers are five individuals: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon them all). This is based on the verse: *He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus* (42:13). And we have already seen verses that are close in meaning to this.

Some commentators have said that all the Messengers (*rusul*) are resolute (*ūlū al-ʿazm*), in which case the *among the Messengers* is taken as an explanation of *the Resolute* (rather than *the Resolute* referring to a sub-category of Messengers). Other commentators have said that they are the eighteen messengers mentioned in Sūrah al-Anʿām (verses 83–90) because after mentioning them, God says: *So follow their guidance* (6:90).

However, God says after mentioning their names: *and from among their fathers, their descendants and brethren* (6:87). Only after this does He say: *So follow their guidance*. So he did not say this immediately after enumerating them.

Others still say that they are nine in number: Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, David and Jesus.

Then there are those who say seven: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus.

Or six, namely those who were commanded to fight: Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ,

Moses, David and Solomon.

Or six others: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job.

Or some have suggested five: Noah, Hūd, Abraham, Shuʿayb, and Moses.

Or some have suggested four: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. And some suggested that the four are: Noah, Abraham, Hūd and Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon all the Prophets).

But these opinions and others are either given without evidence to support them or with evidence that does not actually support what they are saying. For this reason, we have mentioned them only briefly. For a further discussion of the Resolute Messengers, please refer to our discussions of Prophethood in the second part of this work.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse *When We dispatched toward you a team of jinn…* (46:29), we read:
The occasion for its revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) was that God's Messenger had gone out from Mecca to the market of Ukkāẓ, accompanied by Zayd b. Ḥārithah, inviting people to Islam, but no one responded to him and he could find no one who would accept him. Then he returned to Mecca. When he reached a place called "The Valley of the Jinn" (*wādī mujannah*), he recited the Qur'an in the middle of the night. A party of the jinn passed by and when they heard the recitation of God's Messenger they stopped and listened, and when they heard his Qur'an they said to one another: *"Be silent!"* And *when it was finished*—meaning when God's Messenger completed his recitation of the Qur'an—*they turned to their people as warners. They said, "O our people…!"* Then they came to God's Messenger, embraced Islam and believed, and he instructed them in the teachings of Islam. Then God revealed to His Prophet: *Say, "It has been revealed to me that a team of the jinn listened…"* (72:1) and the rest of Sūrat al-Jinn. God recounted what they said, and God's Messenger appointed one of them to govern the others. They would return to God's Messenger at all times, so God's Messenger told the Commander of the Faithful to teach them and instruct them—and amongst them were believers, disbelievers and *nāṣibī*s, Jews, Christians and Magians, and they are the offspring of jinn.

Author's comments: There are many narrations recounting the story of this party of the jinn that listened to the Qur'an but their details differ greatly. There is no way to determine which of their accounts is most accurate from the Qur'an, or from any reliable contextual indicators. For this reason we have restricted ourselves here to mentioning what has been related in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. However, we will mention a few more accounts when we come to Sūrah al-Jinn, God-willing.

(2) And in the same book, we read that the Learned One[1] was asked about the believing jinn; namely, would they enter paradise? He said:

No, but God has realms between paradise and hell in which will dwell the believing jinn and the sinful Shiʿa.

Author's comments: Similar traditions have been narrated through *mawqūf*[2] traditions coming via Sunni chains of narration. Qummī's narration is *mursal*[3] like a *muḍmar*[4] tradition. If it is accepted as authentic, then we must interpret it to mean that they will enter the lowest levels of paradise, as the general statements of the Qur'an indicate that the rewards of paradise encompass all obedient beings, whether humans or jinn.

(3) And in *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narration via Ibn Abī Yaʿfūr, who said:

I heard Abū ʿAbd Allāh say: "The masters of the Prophets and Messengers are five; they are the Resolute Messengers (*ūlū al-ʿazm*), and they are the axis of prophecy:[5] Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad."

(4) In the same book, with a chain of narrators via ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Kathīr from Abū Jaʿfar: God's Messenger said:

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1 One of the Imāms, whose name is not identified. [Trans.]

2 *Mawqūf*: Lit. "stopped"—Traditions that relate the words or deeds of a Companion rather than the Prophet himself. [Trans.]

3 *Mursal*: Lit. "hurried"—a tradition which purports to convey the words or deeds of the Infallible but whose chain of narration is lacking one or more intermediaries. [Trans.]

4 *Muḍmar*: Lit. "implied"—similar to the *mawqūf* category of tradition (see above), except that in this case we are sure that the narrator means to say that this came from the Imām, rather than reflecting his own opinion or interpretation. [Trans.]

5 Lit. "Upon them turns the millstone" (*ʿalayhim dārat al-raḥā*) [Trans.]

The first legatee (*waṣī*) who was on the face of the Earth was Seth, son of Adam. No Prophet has ever come without having a legatee. Altogether, there were one-hundred and twenty-thousand prophets, including five Resolute Ones: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad.

Author's comments: There is an abundance of narrations from the Imāms of the Prophet's Household which indicate that there were five Resolute Messengers. They are related from the Prophet, from Imāms al-Bāqir, al-Ṣādiq and al-Riḍā.

(5) And Mufīd narrates in *Rawḍat al-Wāʿiẓīn*:

The Prophet was asked: "How much is between this world and the Hereafter?"

He replied: "The blink of an eye. God says: *The day when they see what they are promised, as though they had remained only an hour of a day. This is a proclamation* (46:35)."

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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